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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"BE CALM, ANTONIO!" I SAID. "SHE IS DEAD!"

THE MARCHESA'S REVENGE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

A LARGE white house, its many windows glistening like diamonds in the sun, the lower ones peeping out from amid the green and red of the trailing roses which, in summer time, grew over the entrance extending each side to the extreme corner, around which a stray spray would break from its band of cloth which attached it to the wall, to hang listlessly on the other side.

Around the large space of gravel in front a shrubbery ran, divided by the large iron gates opening on the highway, which it had been planted intentionally to hide, not so much from those within as to obstruct the view of those without, chiefly consisting of labourers going to

and fro from their daily toll on the neighbouring farms, their owners and the clergy of the surrounding villages being the chief society in Munford, where "The White House" was situated.

The Squire, who was my mother's father, lived in the Hall, not a mile distant, and in the bright summer-tide we could see from the top windows of the other, which was our home, the blue smoke rise, twisting and curling from over the deep green of the trees which surrounded it in the distance.

But he was dead at the time to which my memory carries me back; his son, my uncle, becoming proprietor of the ancient building dating back to the Crusades, whilst another uncle, owning the next largest estate in the parish, our family monopolised the greatest part, a fact which gained for us absolute sway amongst the inhabitants, who ever spoke of us as their young ladies, and the daughters of their Vicar.

My father had not always lived at Munford, and

I believe I was not born there, but I never knew any other home; and all the joys and sorrows of my young life were centred within the iron gates, which, to my mind, enclosed the loveliest spot on the terrestrial globe. I could not conceive a sweeter garden than the one we could see from our drawing-room window, which looked out from the side, for the house ran far back, covering an immense space of ground, whilst that in which was grown all that was necessary to the kitchen, in the way of fruit and vegetables, was divided by a narrow lane, each side of which a wide deep ditch ran like a miniature moat, with a tiny wooden bridge across on which a green door opened, fastened by lock and key to avoid the depredations which would otherwise have been indulged in by the youth of the village.

An immense chestnut spread its branches over the centre of the grass-plot where the flower-beds were, whilst from one of its strong boughs a swing was fastened for our amusement, and in which, with my head resting against one of the

ropes, I have so often sat dreaming of the future, with the song of the birds and the hum of the busy bees around me, and the rays of the warm sun endeavouring to reach me amid the tall branches swayed hither and thither by the summer breeze.

But it was to before that time that my memory carries me back, when, but a child of four years, my mother died, leaving, besides myself, another sister two years my junior, and a two-month old baby behind her.

It was in January, and ignorant of the loss I had sustained, with childish curiosity I watched from my nursery window the black line of carriages as they passed over the snow, which now thickly covered the ground, and then wended their way slowly and solemnly through the iron gates to the church in the distance, the deep tones of the bell falling at intervals on the wintry air, whilst I pressed my baby nose against the pane, straining my eyes until the last one had disappeared, when, turning for the first time, I learnt from the girl who had attended me that they had gone to bury my dead mother.

At first I could not realise her meaning, but it soon revealed itself to me, and then my first grief came to me in all its intensity, and for days I would continue to cry for her who could hear me no more.

But the years passed on and she was soon forgotten, and we were as happy as children mostly are who have all they require of this world's goods, and are reared with the gentleness and kindness we received. It was thus time quickly fled, and at sixteen I was considered to have so far completed my studies that I had no further need to continue them in the school-room, where my two younger sisters, Mabel and Ella, were pursuing theirs under the charge of Miss Karlsake, a governess who was but a few years my senior.

She was a fair, tall girl of twenty-two, with eyes blue as the heavens, the faintest tinge of pink on her delicate cheek, whilst her lips were like a rosebud, and from the first my heart warmed towards her, so different in every way to the austere and middle-aged ladies who had preceded her, and during whose reign revolution was ever ripe in the school-room; but which entirely subsided when Birdie Karlsake held the reins of government. Mabel and Ella's high spirits becoming quiet and subdued beneath the influence of her power.

Whatever could her friends be thinking of, the ladies would say, to allow a beautiful young thing like her to go as governess in the house of a widower; and even the old housekeeper who had been with us ever since our mother's death held up her hands in astonishment when Miss Fathfull's (who was the last one) successor presented herself.

Master must be mad, she insisted, for if he never spoke a word to the girl, the neighbours would be sure to concoct a thousand stories to his discredit with regard to the beautiful governess, all of which came to my father's ears without drawing anything further than a smile from him; and Birdie remained in our nest making us very happy, and outliving the ill-natured comments her beauty had evoked. And so the months passed into years, and people no longer talked of the Vicar, to whom they had some time since now given credit for better sense than to make love to a girl little older than his own daughters, when, least expected, the news that he was going to be married fell like a bomb-shell in their midst.

"That was what Birdie had been angling for, for the last two years, with her simpering ways and quiet looks," Miss Mathews, a lady of uncertain age, declared, who had, ever since our mother's death, looked upon herself as the most proper person to fill that mother's place, having been born and reared in the village, and knowing every man, woman and child in it. "Poor children!" she continued to the neighbour with whom she was commenting on the subject; and then she heaved a sigh in contemplation of the miseries and cruelties we were supposed to be subjected to when Birdie became Mrs. McFarlane.

"Ain't it ridiculous now," the woman replied,

to whom Miss Mathews was a good customer, she being a small trader in the parish. "A man old enough to be her father," and then she looked into the lady's face, as much as to say, "now if it had been you!" a look thoroughly understood by the other who, immediately made another small purchase, although the article was perfectly useless to her, when after a few more confidences, in which the Vicar's and Miss Karlsake's names were freely handled, she left the shop.

Cook gave notice shortly after, declaring she would not remain a day after. Mrs. Frost, the housekeeper, left, whilst nurse was in a continual bath of tears, looking so far into futurity as to wonder how the master could think for one moment she would stay to nurse the children of a second wife, the housemaid alone exposing the cause of the poor girl, who, to avoid further scandal, determined to leave the White House until she returned to it as its mistress.

My father could not avoid being aware of how the rumour of his marriage had affected his parishioners towards him, but he took no more notice now than when, three years since, they had aired their opinion respecting his choice of a governess for his children. He shook hands as cordially with Miss Mathews, and increased rather than decreased his orders at the little shop, as though neither had ever uttered a word in dispraise of his conduct, whilst he failed to see the cold shoulder turned towards him, and the tone of reception was apparently lost on him.

I quickly overcame the jealous twinges which attacked me when I first heard from Birdie herself how matters stood, but on Mabel and Ella the confession had a different effect.

"I shall almost hate her now," they both avowed, and I was not sorry for her sake when I saw our late governess quit the house, where I trusted, when she again returned with the spring flowers, she would bring with her a renewal of the love which was previously hers.

"You will love me still, Gertie," she said, as she at the last moment drew me towards her, and pressed a warm kiss on my lips, and in that moment, I forgot all but how beautiful, how lovable she looked, and threw my arms round her neck, returning passionately the kiss she had given. She then held out her hand to Mabel and Ella, but they merely touched the tips of her fingers, and I could see the tears well to her beautiful eyes as they drew back from the embrace she offered, and then she stepped into the carriage awaiting her, the sound of a dry sob not escaping my ears as she turned from us.

"How could you be so unkind," I said, when for the last time having waved an adieu to her, I turned to my sisters, who, with their arms twined round each other's waists, were watching my movements. "We had only papa, and she has taken him from us," they replied, with pouting lips, and who would have said more had not the handle of the library door which opened on to the hall turned, and my father made his appearance.

He came up to where they stood, kindly telling them they had no time to lose if they would dress preparatory to dinner, and I knew he had heard nothing of what they had said, with that door closed between them, and he thinking but of the girl whom he had been watching from the window until the last glimpse of the carriage containing his jewel had passed from his view.

So Mabel and Ella moved from the spot, a sense of deep injustice clouding the usual brightness of their happy lives; and I ascended to my own room, wondering the while if my father had acted wisely in linking the fate of one so young as Birdie with his own.

But he evidently never thought for a moment but that his judgment in the choice of the bride he had selected was a correct one, and the disparity in their years was a point to which, I believe, he had never given a second consideration.

"Of course, Birdie's standing in this household will, on her return, be on an entirely different footing, Gertie," he told me, when, after dinner, he confided to me their position; "and I trust for my sake you will do all you can to

contribute to her happiness, treating her in every respect as though she was your own mother."

"Scarcely that, papa," I smiled, as it occurred to me how absurd the notion was of looking on this girl, little older than myself, in the light of a parent; "but I will love her as an elder sister, never forgetting that she is your wife," I added.

"You are a good girl," he said, stroking my hair; and then I turned to join Mabel and Ella, who were singing a duet in the drawing-room, leaving him in happy contemplation of his new-born happiness.

CHAPTER II.

A few weeks after, and a brother clergyman agreed to officiate in his stead the while he was absent on a short holiday, he told him; but I knew when he returned to Mansfield he would bring Birdie with him as his wife.

The winter had passed; even the cold easterly winds, so prevalent in spring, giving way to a soft, balmy breeze, and a bright sun filled the air with a genial warmth on the day we were led to expect the arrival of the newly married pair.

I had so far succeeded in reconciling my sisters to what they considered their hard fate as to raise a smile on their gloomy countenances, when carriage wheels resounded on the gravel, and they rendered scarce a less warm welcome to our late governess than I did myself.

"How pretty, I thought, she looked when, placing a tiny gloved hand in that of my father, she descended from the carriage. A flush of excitement showed itself on either cheek as she ascended the steps leading to the entrance hall, and there was a certain timidity in her movements, as though she feared the reception awaiting her; but seeing me the first to express my welcome, the tears started to her eyes, and then we were locked in each other's embrace.

"Birdie still, dear," she said, seeing as the fanned, in hesitation on my part as to how I should address her, and then, moving towards the others, she held out a hand to each, looking so bewitching the while that even they could not resist the influence of her charm.

But after awhile even that failed to weigh against the feeling of jealousy my younger sisters entertained towards her, which was not lessened by the teaching of Miss Mathews whenever they happened to come in contact with that lady.

"A simpering bit of a girl like that! I can't think how you young ladies can bear to see her filling the place left vacant by the death of your sainted mother!" she said, when on one occasion they met not long after Birdie's return; "but there, poor dear," she continued, "you were not old enough to know the loss you sustained when it pleased the Lord to take her," and Miss Mathews closed her eyes in saintly humility, "or you would never bring your tongue to call this one mamma."

"Oh, we never do that, Miss Mathews," Mabel replied; "she is so little older than ourselves, it would be absurd!"

"Absurd! I should think so. Now if your father had married a woman of his own age," and Miss Mathews paused, trusting they would see the point of her argument, "why no one would have said a word against it, for it is but natural that Mr. McFarlane should have married again." But the girls failed to understand her meaning, or even if they did decided to give preference to the choice already made than to have had such a person as her for their stepmother; so stating as an excuse that they must return quickly, for it was near upon dinner-time, they bade the maiden lady good-bye.

There was in the months that succeeded no direct outbreak in the home circle at the White House, but my father could not fail to observe that a feeling of discontent had entered within, and I found it useless to endeavour to dispel that foolish jealousy which had taken so deep a hold of my sisters' imagination that the attempt to make them cast such from their minds only

fanned the flame of the animosity they now nurtured towards their youthful stepmother.

"Oh! of course you take her part," they would say, "and we are always in the wrong, as we are with papa now. We will go as governesses ourselves, anything rather than stay here," they added, passionately. "Miss Mathews wonders we can remain to be snubbed as we are, and all because of her, until we hate her!"

We were seated in the drawing-room, the lamps had not been as yet lighted, for we preferred to sit by the open window to watch the bright crimson-and-gold of the setting sun from amid the deep green of the distant trees, until it gradually faded from view, leaving nought but the silver-grey of the clouds with their golden edges to tell where he had sunk to rest, and then the shadows of night fell over all.

"Miss Mathews is no friend of yours!" I answered, hotly, for I was sick of hearing her name so often brought forward; and then I rose with the intention of ringing for lights, when I fancied the door closed softly, but no one answering my question, "Who is there?" I concluded I was mistaken. I pulled the bell, and shortly after a servant entered with lights.

My father followed almost immediately, seemingly surprised to find us girls alone.

"Where is Birdie?" he asked.

"I thought she was with you," I answered. "We have not seen her all the evening."

"Go and find her," he said, looking sharply towards my sister, fearing, I knew, that they had, through some fresh unkindness, driven her from the room; but on my volunteering to seek her he made no further remark, only impatiently awaiting the solution of her absenting herself.

I was not away more than ten minutes I was sure, but before I returned he was calling me, and when I re-entered the drawing-room he looked up anxiously to see without my speaking first that something was amiss.

"What is it, Gertie?" he asked.

"She is in her own room, papa," I answered, "and—very—ill."

"Ill!" he exclaimed, "and all alone!" And then he rang the bell violently, giving directions that a man from the stables should be sent at once to Dr. Clowes, when he followed me along the corridor leading to Birdie's room.

I had already ordered the household not to leave her until my return; but she turned as he advanced towards the bed on which she lay, and I knew the signs of weeping apparent on her countenance was not caused so much from the pain she was suffering as from the unkind words uttered by Mabel which she had overheard.

"I did not intend to listen," she had told me; "but do not let your father know; it would only get them into trouble."

It was but a short distance to the doctor's residence, and within the hour he had arrived but it was not until the grey of the early dawn came peeping within the closed blinds that he took his departure, and then a tiny sister was added to our fold—another link, as the others thought, to draw our father closer to his girl-wife and further from them.

"A pity it wasn't born dead," they said; but when on the second day nurse exultantly displayed it to us as "the most beautiful baby she ever saw," they could not deny that it was a sweet little thing, for it opened its pretty eyes, looking as though to crave the love they had determined to withhold from it.

One consolation they found was in the not being a boy, for in that case they felt sure our father would have made an idol of it; but as it was he took little or no notice of the tiny mite, even to Birdie's eulogiums on its beauty, saying he was not much of a judge of babies, but he supposed it was all right, and he would be better able to give an opinion after it had had a short time to grow; and as if anxious to do so quickly it fed and slept and slept and fed until dimples one could not resist displayed themselves in a marvellous way; and when he, after the third week, just touched its waxen cheek, the little mouth wreathed itself into its first smile, which won his heart in an instant.

The christening was to be deferred until

Birdie's recovery, which was so slow that although he had never expressed his fear, I knew papa was growing each day more anxious about her.

Baby was now a month old, and yet she had never left her room, the fatigue of being removed even to her couch apparently proving too much for her.

It was on one of these days, when, with nurse's assistance, I had drawn her up to the open window, for it was a glorious evening in July, that she held my hand as I was about to move away.

"Don't go, Gertie," she said, "but sit down here, dear, by my side. I have so much to say to you, and—and my time is not very long."

I took the seat she indicated, close by where the sweet honeysuckle was trained, filling the room with its fragrance. The glare of the midday sun had softened as its rays fell on the green grass, a gentle breeze amid the rustling leaves where the branches of the trees swayed to and fro, the only sound save the song of the feathered minstrels in their midst, and for a moment all seemed so peaceful, so calm, that a single thought of trouble never entered my imagination; but on her repeating the words I turned, and then, for the first time, the truth of what she said revealed itself to me. Her stay would not be long here! But it came to me so suddenly that for the moment I could not utter a word, and when I recovered myself sufficiently to speak lightly of her fears, I knew that she was aware they were shared by me equally as herself.

"No, dear," she returned, in reply to some remark I made as to their being groundless. "It is no use, Gertie, to deceive you or myself; I shall never be well again. Dr. Clowes has told me as much, and I begged of him not to say so to your father; but I think you love me, Gertie," she added, looking wistfully into my face with those wondrous blue eyes I always thought so beautiful, but which appeared doubly so now.

"Love you, Birdie!" I replied, "even more than my own sisters. But you must not talk of going, dear—you so young, so beautiful!" and when I broke down, I could say no more, as, throwing myself on my knees by her side, I buried my face in her robes to stifle the sobs I could not control.

She passed her white transparent hand over my hair.

"Don't cry, Gertie," she said. "It is all for the best. Mabel and Ella do not like me, and I could not feel happy in the thought that I should come between them and their father. You don't think it was my wish to do so, do you, dear?" she continued; "for, indeed, it was not. I wanted so to love them as I love you, but they would not let me; and when I am gone, maybe they will think more kindly of me."

She paused for a few moments then; a faint tinge of pink had dyed her cheek in her excitement, whilst a last ray of the sun, which was sinking lower and lower, rested on her golden hair, like a halo around her, the white negligee she wore hanging loosely over her figure, adding to the ethereal beauty, which even sickness was powerless to take from her.

"I want to give her to you, dear—my baby—Gertie—before I go," she added; and then she nervously awaited my reply, but I could only press her hand, I could not speak. "You will love her—be her mother! Tell me you will," she went on "and I shall die happy!"

"I will, I will, Birdie!" I answered, between my sobs, for I could feel how anxious she was growing.

And then she kissed me, and I knew how happy I had made her, for she fell into a peaceful slumber, her hand clasped in mine; and I, watching, for her sake, subduing my grief, whilst the feathered songsters sang on in the swaying trees, until even they were quiet, the whispering leaves alone rustling in the twilight.

In the days that followed my father discovered the truth; they could not keep it from him longer; and when the end came—which it did shortly after—his grief was terrible to see. It was then, the night Birdie died, that he had been with her all the day, for no entreaty would

move him from her side, the while the food they brought him was taken away untouched. He had pillow'd her head on his breast, even at the last hoping against hope that she would be spared to him, until a silence more than earthly crept around him; and in the stillness which had till then filled the room, he felt one greater—it was the stillness of death. Birdie, his wife, the love of his middle age, had passed away in his arms! And still he remained, the lifeless clay growing cold and stiff on his broad shoulder.

"Come away, papa, dear," I said; for nurse had approached now, and lifted the body, so as to lay it down that she might close the dead eyes.

"Yes, yes," he said, looking at me in a stupefied, dazed way; and then allowed me to lead him unwillingly from the room.

He remained thus for some time, looking vacantly around, as if unable to realize his great sorrow, until on the appearance of Dr. Clowes he apparently returned to his mind; and then, with a deep groan, he buried his head in his hands, whilst hot scalding tears oozed from between his fingers—hot, blessed tears which had saved his reason!

CHAPTER III.

A FEW days later and Birdie was laid to rest, but not in the family vault within the chancel, from the painted window of which, just behind the altar, the rays of the morning sun would throw his beams, softened by the coloured glass, on the tessellated floor, but just without—beneath a tree where the branches drooped low, until they kissed the soft green grass covering her grave, and the birds would sing her requiem in the branches overhead!

Roses were planted around beneath their shelter by my father's own hands, for he considered the ground where she lay too sacred for a stranger's tread; and then iron railings separated it from the rest. And after a few weeks most had forgotten the Vicar's child-wife, save the Vicar himself.

And so the years passed on, my father growing old more rapidly than they; and little Birdie—for we had named her after her dead mother—quickly budding into womanhood.

"How like she is to my poor girl, Gertie!" my father would say, when together we often discussed the merits of our pet.

Mabel and Ella had long since been married, and I might have done, but the promise I had given to the dead prevented me; and the first pang over—for it was not without the sacrifice of true man's love that I remained single—I became resigned, feeling happier than if I had gratified my own wish, determining in the future to seek my happiness in the welfare of my baby sister, as I always called her, although she was now in her seventeenth year.

"I am sure, dear Gertie, I no longer require a governess," she said to me one day, when we had been speaking respecting the merits of a middle-aged lady who had offered to replace Miss Marston, she having left to be married.

She had advanced to where I was sitting after the former had been bowed from the room on a promise that she should hear from me when I had received a reply from the lady whom she had named for reference, and then throwing herself at my feet, so as to rest against my knee, Birdie lifted her eyes, beautiful as her mother's, to mine.

"I could not endure an old woman, Gertie," she said. I smiled, for I was no longer young and to her doubtless appeared very aged indeed.

I suppose she read my thoughts, for she lifted her arms, displaying them in all their rounded beauty, when clasping them round my neck she drew me down until her lips met mine.

"I don't mean you, dear, dear Gertie! You are not old, and if you were as ancient as Methuselah, I should love you just the same."

After that, of course, as usual, my pet carried her point, and it was agreed that she should receive instructions in music, which she dearly

ropes, I have so often sat dreaming of the future, with the song of the birds and the hum of the busy bees around me, and the rays of the warm sun endeavouring to reach me amid the full branches swayed hither and thither by the summer breeze.

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"Of course, Birdie's standing in this household will, on her return, be on an entirely different footing, Gertie," he told me, when, after dinner, he confided to me their position; "and I trust for my sake you will do all you can to

contribute to her happiness, treating her in every respect as though she was your own mother."

"Scarcely that, papa," I smiled, as it occurred to me how absurd the notion was of looking on this girl, little older than myself, in the light of a parent; "but I will love her as an elder sister, never forgetting that she is your wife," I added.

"You are a good girl," he said, stroking my hair; and then I turned to join Mabel and Ella, who were singing a duet in the drawing-room, leaving him in happy contemplation of his newborn happiness.

CHAPTER II.

A FEW weeks after, and a brother clergyman agreed to officiate in his stead the while he was absent on a short holiday, he told him; but I knew when he returned to Manford he would bring Birdie with him as his wife.

The winter had passed; even the cold easterly winds, so prevalent in spring, giving way to a soft, balmy breeze, and a bright sun filled the air with genial warmth on the day we were led to expect the arrival of the newly married pair.

I had so far succeeded in reconciling my sisters to what they considered their hard fate as to raise a smile on their gloomy countenances, when carriage wheels resounded on the gravel, and they rendered scarce a less warm welcome to our late governess than I did myself.

How pretty, I thought, she looked when placing a tiny gloved hand in that of my father, she descended from the carriage. A flush of excitement showed itself on either cheek as she ascended the steps leading to the entrance hall, and there was a certain timidity in her movements, as though she feared the reception awaiting her; but seeing me the first to express my welcome, the tears started to her eyes, and then we were locked in each other's embrace.

"Birdie still, dear," she said, seeing, as she fancied, a hesitation on my part as to how I should address her, and then, moving towards the others, she held out a hand to each, looking so bewitching the while that even they could not resist the influence of her charm.

But after awhile even that failed to weigh against the feeling of jealousy my younger sisters entertained towards her, which was not lessened by the teaching of Miss Mathews whenever they happened to come in contact with that lady.

"A simpering bit of a girl like that! I can't think how you young ladies can bear to see her filling the place last vacant by the death of your sainted mother!" she said, when on one occasion they met not long after Birdie's return; "but there, poor dears," she continued, "you were not old enough to know the loss you sustained when it pleased the Lord to take her," and Miss Mathews closed her eyes in saintly humility, "or you would never bring your tongue to call this one mamma."

"Oh, we never do that, Miss Mathews," Mabel replied; "she is so little older than ourselves, it would be absurd!"

"Absurd! I should think so. Now if your father had married a woman of his own age," and Miss Mathews paused, trusting they would see the point of her argument, "why no one would have said a word against it, for it is but natural that Mr. McFarlane should have married again." But the girls failed to understand her meaning, or even if they did decidedly gave preference to the choice already made than to have had such a person as her for their stepmother; so stating as an excuse that they must return quickly, for it was near dinner-time, they bade the maiden lady good-bye.

There was in the months that succeeded no direct outbreak in the home circle at the White House, but my father could not fail to observe that a feeling of discontent had entered within, and I found it useless to endeavour to dispel that foolish jealousy which had taken so deep a hold of my sisters' imagination that the attempt to make them cast such from their minds only

fanned the flame of the animosity they now nurtured towards their youthful stepmother.

"Oh! of course you take her part," they would say, "and we are always in the wrong, as we are with papa now. We will go as governesses ourselves, anything rather than stay here," they added, passionately. "Miss Mathews wonders we can remain to be snubbed as we are, and all because of her, until we hate her!"

We were seated in the drawing-room, the lamps had not been as yet lighted, for we preferred to sit by the open window to watch the bright crimson-and-gold of the setting sun from amid the deep green of the distant trees, until it gradually faded from view, leaving nought but the silver-grey of the clouds with their golden edges to tell where he had sunk to rest, and then the shadows of night fell over all.

"Miss Mathews is no friend of yours!" I answered, hotly, for I was sick of hearing her name so often brought forward; and then I rose with the intention of ringing for lights, when I fancied the door closed softly, but no one answering my question, "Who is there?" I concluded I was mistaken. I pulled the bell, and shortly after a servant entered with lights.

My father followed almost immediately, seemingly surprised to find us girls alone.

"Where is Birdie?" he asked.

"I thought she was with you," I answered. "We have not seen her all the evening."

"Go and find her," he said, looking sharply towards my sisters, fearing, I knew, that they had, through some fresh unkindness, driven her from the room; but on my volunteering to seek her he made no further remark, only impatiently awaiting the solution of her absenting herself.

I was not away more than ten minutes I was sure, but before I returned he was calling me, and when I re-entered the drawing-room he looked up anxiously to see without my speaking first that something was amiss.

"What is it, Gertie?" he asked.

"She is in her own room, papa," I answered, "and—very—ill."

"Ill!" he exclaimed, "and all alone!" And then he rang the bell violently, giving directions that a man from the stables should be sent at once to Dr. Clowes, when he followed me along the corridor leading to Birdie's room.

I had already ordered the housemaid not to leave her until my return; but she turned as he advanced towards the bed on which she lay, and I knew the signs of weeping apparent on her countenance was not caused so much from the pain she was suffering as from the unkind words uttered by Mabel which she had overheard.

"I did not intend to hate," she had told me; "but do not let your father know; it would only get them into trouble."

It was but a short distance to the doctor's residence, and within the hour he had arrived but it was not until the grey of the early dawn came peeping within the closed blinds that he took his departure, and then a tiny slater was added to our fold—another link, as the others thought, to draw our father closer to his girl-wife and further from them.

"A pity it wasn't born dead," they said; but when on the second day nurse exultantly displayed it to us as "the most beautiful baby she ever saw," they could not deny but that it was a sweet little thing, for it opened its pretty eyes, looking as though to crave the love they had determined to withhold from it.

One consolation they found was in its not being a boy, for in that case they felt sure our father would have made an idol of it; but as it was he took little or no notice of the tiny mite, even to Birdie's eulogiums on its beauty, saying he was not much of a judge of babies, but he supposed it was all right, and he would be better able to give an opinion after it had had a short time to grow; and as if anxious to do so quickly it fed and slept and slept and fed until dimples one could not resist displayed themselves in a marvellous way; and when he, after the third week, just touched its waxen cheek, the little mouth wreathed itself into its first smile, which won his heart in an instant.

The christening was to be deferred until

Birdie's recovery, which was so slow that although he had never expressed his fear, I knew papa was growing each day more anxious about her.

Baby was now a month old, and yet she had never left her room, the fatigue of being removed even to her couch apparently proving too much for her.

It was on one of these days, when, with nurse's assistance, I had drawn her up to the open window, for it was a glorious evening in July, that she held my hand as I was about to move away.

"Don't go, Gertie," she said, "but sit down here, dear, by my side. I have so much to say to you, and—my time is not very long."

I took the seat she indicated, close by where the sweet honeysuckle was trained, filling the room with its fragrance. The glare of the mid-day sun had softened as its rays fell on the green grass, a gentle breeze amid the rustling leaves where the branches of the trees swayed to and fro, the only sound save the song of the feathered minstrels in their midst, and for a moment all seemed so peaceful, so calm, that a single thought of trouble never entered my imagination; but on her repeating the words I turned, and then, for the first time, the truth of what she said revealed itself to me. Her stay would not be long here! But it came to me so suddenly that for the moment I could not utter a word, and when I recovered myself sufficiently to speak lightly of her fears, I knew that she was aware they were shared by me equally as herself.

"No, dear," she returned, in reply to some remark I made as to their being groundless. "It is no use, Gertie, to deceive you or myself; I shall never be well again. Dr. Clowes has told me as much, and I begged of him not to say so to your father; but I think you love me, Gertie," she added, looking wistfully into my face with those wondrous blue eyes I always thought so beautiful, but which appeared doubly so now.

"Love you, Birdie!" I replied, "even more than my own sisters. But you must not talk of going, dear—you so young, so beautiful!" and then I broke down. I could say no more, as, throwing myself on my knees by her side, I buried my face in her robe to stifle the sobs I could not control.

She passed her white transparent hand over my hair.

"Don't cry, Gertie," she said. "It is all for the best. Mabel and Ella do not like me, and I could not feel happy in the thought that I should come between them and their father. You don't think it was my wish to do so, do you, dear?" she continued: "for, indeed, it was not. I wanted so to love them as I love you, but they would not let me; and when I am gone, maybe they will think more kindly of me."

She paused for a few moments then; a faint tinge of pink had dyed her cheek in her excitement, whilst a last ray of the sun, which was sinking lower and lower, rested on her golden hair, like a halo around her, the white peignoir she wore hanging loosely over her figure, adding to the ethereal beauty, which even sickness was powerless to take from her.

"I want to give her to you; dear—my baby—Gertie—before I go," she added; and then she nervously awaited my reply, but I could only press her hand, I could not speak. "You will love her—be her mother! Tell me you will," she went on "and I shall die happy!"

"I will, I will, Birdie!" I answered, between my sobs, for I could feel how anxious she was growing.

And then she kissed me, and I knew how happy I had made her, for she fell into a peaceful slumber, her hand clasped in mine; and I, watching, for her sake, subduing my grief, whilst the feathered songsters sang on in the swaying trees, until even they were quiet, the whispering leaves alone rustling in the twilight.

In the days that followed my father discovered the truth; they could not keep it from him longer; and when the end came—which it did shortly after—his grief was terrible to see. It was then, the night Birdie died, that he had been with her all the day, for no entreaty would

move him from her side, the while the food they brought him was taken away untouched. He had pillow'd her head on his breast, even at the last hoping against hope that she would be spared to him, until a silence more than earthly crept around him; and in the stillness which had till then filled the room, he felt one greater—it was the stillness of death. Birdie, his wife, the love of his middle age, had passed away in his arms! And still he remained, the lifeless clay growing cold and stiff on his broad shoulder.

"Come away, papa, dear," I said; for nurse had approached now, and lifted the body, so as to lay it down that she might close the dead eye.

"Yes, yes," he said, looking at me in a stupefied, dazed way; and then allowed me to lead him unwillingly from the room.

He remained thus for some time, looking vacantly around, as if unable to realize his great sorrow, until on the appearance of Dr. Clowes it apparently returned to his mind; and then, with a deep groan, he buried his head in his hands, whilst hot scalding tears oozed from between his fingers—hot, blessed tears which had saved his reason!

CHAPTER III.

A FEW days later and Birdie was laid to rest, but not in the family vault within the chancel, from the painted window of which, just behind the altar, the rays of the morning sun would throw his beams, softened by the coloured glass, on the transomed floor, but just without—beneath a tree where the branches drooped low, until they kissed the soft green grass covering her grave, and the birds would sing her requiem in the branches overhead!

Roses were planted around beneath their shelter by my father's own hands, for he considered the ground where she lay too sacred for a stranger's tread; and then iron palisades separated it from the rest. And after a few weeks most had forgotten the Vicar's child-wife, save the Vicar himself.

And so the years passed on, my father growing old more rapidly than they; and little Birdie—for we had named her after her dead mother—quikly budding into womanhood.

"How like she is to my poor girl, Gertie!" my father would say, when together we often discussed the merits of our pet.

Mabel and Ella had long since been married, and I might have done, but the promise I had given to the dead prevented me; and the first pang over—for it was not without the sacrifice of a true man's love that I remained single—I became resigned, feeling happier than if I had gratified my own wish, determining in the future to seek my happiness in the welfare of my baby sister, as I always called her, although she was now in her seventeenth year.

"I am sure, dear Gertie, I no longer require a governess," she said to me one day, when we had been speaking respecting the merits of a middle-aged lady who had offered to replace Miss Marston, she having left to be married.

She had advanced to where I was sitting after the former had been bowed from the room on a promise that she should hear from me when I had received a reply from the lady whom she had named for reference, and then throwing herself at my feet, so as to rest against my knee, Birdie lifted her eyes, beautiful as her mother's, to mine.

"I could not endure an old woman, Gertie," she said. I smiled, for I was no longer young and to her doubtless appeared very aged indeed.

I suppose she read my thoughts, for she lifted her arms, displaying them in all their rounded beauty, when clasping them round my neck she drew me down until her lips met mine.

"I don't mean you, dear, dear Gertie! You are not old, and if you were as ancient as Methuselah, I should love you just the same."

After that, of course, as usual, my pet carried her point, and it was agreed that she should receive instructions in music, which she dearly

loved, from a master who had been recommended by one of the county families, the while she should pursue her other studies, assisted by my superior knowledge. Papa was delighted with this arrangement; he would see more of his sunbeam (as he called her), he said, than when a governess was in constant attendance.

Sigñor Palezzi was therefore interviewed and engaged to give my darling a lesson twice a week. His terms were decidedly extravagant, for we were not rich, but my father never demurred respecting anything which would advance the interests of Birdie, and would have agreed to have given double the sum he asked had she wished it.

Nonetheless the middle-aged lady was disappointed when she received my letter informing her that other arrangements having been made, her services would not be required, but so it was, and a few days after the Italian came to give his first lesson.

He was the usual type of foreigner, a little above the usual height, with supple limbs, and a form like and graceful, while his face was a study such as Raphael would have loved to portray. It was perfect, with such eyes as I had never before seen save on the canvas, dark velvety eyes, the one moment melting and sad beneath the influence of the heavenly strains which no human fingers had before his caused to sound from our piano, not one of the most modern, and the next frothing over with delight as a merry thought passed through his mind; and I could not help imagining how terrible they could be in anger, but of that we were unable to judge. To us he was politeness itself, even in conformity with our English manners, as if in sympathy throwing in the lightest tone of reserve in his bearing towards us.

"Well, how do you like him, Birdie?" I asked, as the first lesson over, Sigñor Palezzi bowed himself out of the room, and we imagined, for we could not hear his footsteps on the carpet, how he was tripping down the stairs to where his vehicle awaited him at the hall door.

"I like him so much, Gertie!" she answered, twisting herself round on the stool where he had left her by the piano. "I know I shall get on gloriously; and oh! if I can only play and sing as he does, I feel I could love him directly!"

The words were only spoken in jest; but they say coming events cast their shadows before them. However, I looked up, she in all her youth and beauty a very picture before me, and somehow a cold shiver seemed to pass through my frame.

I don't know, but I suppose I looked strange, for, jumping up, Birdie threw her arms round my neck and covered me with kisses, whilst she let her beautiful face rest against mine.

"Why, you silly old Gertie," she said, "any-one would suppose I had fallen in love, run away, and got married to the handsome Sigñor all at once, and you had just heard of it, to see your expression of alarm;" and I laughed, too, for I thought how foolish she must think me.

But, as Birdie said she should, she improved wonderfully under the Sigñor's teaching; her fresh, young voice, clear as a bell, falling on the ear as the ripples of a fairy brook.

A new piano was a birthday present papa made her when she was seventeen. It was a splendid instrument, and Sigñor Palezzi's judgment on it was most satisfactory; but after a while it seemed to me Birdie failed to take the same interest in her practice as before; and on one or two occasions, when entering the room suddenly, I found her, the piano open but her face was buried in her hands, whilst the ivory keys remained untouched.

"Are you not well, Birdie?" I asked, when on one occasion I thus surprised her, as advancing to where she sat, I laid my hand on her sunny head.

"Well! yes, dear," she answered, starting. "How you made me jump, Gertie, only my head aches a little;" and then she commenced a symphony, but I could see the tears slowly swell to her beautiful eyes, until they rested on the long deep lashes, to tumble the next moment down her rounded cheek.

"It is more than a mere headache which makes you like this, my child," I said, drawing her

towards me, for she could not play, the notes appearing all blurred and dim before her; but she only smiled through her tears, declaring there was really nothing, the while I knew well she was hiding something from me—a something which for a moment trembled on her lips, as she weighed in her mind whether she should tell me or not.

But she did not, the rest of the evening, as I thought, making an effort that the gaiety she assumed should appear natural.

Birdie had called in the afternoon, for she lived but a short distance from the old home, and whilst listening to the wonders said and done by my little nephew, youngest of four, I gave no further heed to Birdie, who had taken the opportunity to slip from the room to take a stroll in the garden, as the servant of whom I inquired afterwards told me.

"It was a lovely summer's evening; the sun had long since sunk to rest behind the grey clouds, and quite a little army of gnats were dancing in the soft, cool air, a sign of continued fine weather, Ella said after she had come to an end of her troubles, which she had been confiding to me with regard to Bobby's measles, which not being content with attacking Bobby alone, had spread amongst the entire household, even to the under-nurse, who was obliged through it to leave.

"This is the best time of the day, I think," I said, "and as you are not going home till tomorrow let us join Birdie in the garden; the child must be lonely."

"I shall be only too glad," Ella answered; so we tripped down the stairs beneath the rose-covered porch to where the path led round the corner to the flower-beds; but we walked all round the large grass plot, down the trellis-walk, where the honeysuckle grew, and then behind, where an artificial rockery divided this from a smaller garden, but no sign of Birdie.

"She must have gone in," Ella said, turning to a path, on one side of which grew a high evergreen hedge between it and the wide ditch on the other; but just then a whisper of subdued voices reached our ears, and the glimmer of a white dress was visible in the twilight.

Ella was the first to see it.

"Why, it is Birdie," she said, "in the lane there;" but before I could take in her meaning the white dress had disappeared.

"Who can be with her?" she continued, "for I am sure I heard a man's voice; but perhaps it is papa," she added, although she knew quite well that poor papa was fast asleep in his armchair when we sauntered out.

Whether my face betrayed me I cannot tell, but I felt my heart flutter, for I remembered what had passed only that afternoon when I found Birdie bathed in tears; but I made no reply further than to saunter onwards towards where the little bridge led to the gate which opened on to the lane. I did so, hoping she might enter the house before us, and I might be able to make Ella believe she was mistaken; but my good genius forsook me, for just as we reached the spot Birdie entered the garden.

She had thrown a scarlet wrap over her head, but, notwithstanding, her face bore a white, frightened expression when she saw us.

"We have been looking everywhere for you, Birdie!" Ella said. "Whatever made you wander up that miserable lane alone at this time of night?"

She laid such a stress on the alone that the girl started, and in the dim light I fancied the colour flew to her face, but it might have been fancy, for the next moment she had recovered herself.

"To g'ther these," she said. "Are they not lovely?" And she held out a group of wild roses she had in her hand.

"The roses are pretty, but beware of the thorns, Birdie," my sister answered; and then we simultaneously turned to re-enter the house as the sound of wheels fall on our ears; and notwithstanding that Birdie urged us not to stay, for it was growing chilly, Ella seemed determined to see who it was. Vehicular traffic in our quiet village at that time, when the farmers and their hands had mostly retired to rest, or were hanging over their gates enjoying the cool

evening air, and their pipes at the same time, was so uncommon an occurrence that I could say nothing to her satisfying her curiosity; therefore, telling her we would leave her to follow on, Birdie and I re-entered the house.

"Well, I hope you were repaid for your trouble. Who was the stranger?" I asked, when after a few minutes she joined us.

"You would never guess, Gertie, if you tried till Doomsday," she replied. "Perhaps Birdie could," and she looked in her direction, but the girl was seemingly too occupied with her music which she had commenced sorting to heed her question. So she added, "It was that horrid little music teacher, Sigñor Palezzi, of all people in the world, and at this late hour."

"Returning most likely from Lady Travers's," I said. "I know he goes there late."

"And returns to Wincford Station by this, the longest route," she replied, sarcastically, looking the while at Birdie, who had for the moment raised her eyes—I fancied in gratitude to mine.

"I did not know that you knew Sigñor Palezzi, Ella!" my father ventured, who heard and saw nothing further than what he considered was a bit of spite on Ella's part that he should have anyone so expensive to instruct her step-sister, when Miss Long had been considered a sufficient artiste for her tuition.

"Why, papa, it was through Lady Travers that I heard he was teaching Birdie, and May showing such a taste for music, I persuaded my husband to let her study under him also; but, notwithstanding that I love his music, I hate the man, who I believe to be a thorough bad one," and then she whispered the remainder. But notwithstanding that the whole sentence had been conveyed in an undertone, and the girl at the piano had let her fingers rest lightly on the keys, I knew that not a word had escaped her, for as the last expression of hatred was uttered she inadvertently struck a wrong chord, and then pleading fatigue rose from the instrument.

"I will go to bed now, Gertie dear," she said. "I don't think I am very well," and then I kissed her warm cheek, loving her in that moment far more, for I knew she was in trouble when watching her with a heavy heart as my father gathered her in his arms. Ella bade her a cold good-night, and then the door closed behind her.

And long after, when all the household was wrapped in slumber, I lay thinking—thinking.

Thinking of what? And the old adage running in my head. "Coming events cast their shadows before them."

CHAPTER IV.

THE next day Sigñor Palezzi came as usual to give his lesson, and I had made up my mind to remain in the room during the time, which had lately far exceeded the hour to which it was limited; but my intention was frustrated, a parochial case of some import calling me away before I had taken up my station twenty minutes; but after disposing of the interruption I was about to return to the drawing-room, when, on consulting my watch, I found I had been absent considerably longer than I had thought.

"Has Sigñor Palezzi left?" I asked of the parlourmaid, who I met on the landing leading to the room where I had left them, concluding, from hearing no sound, that such was the case.

"I don't think so, miss," the girl answered when, passing her, I proceeded towards the door.

They were still seated by the instrument, but I could not fail to see that on making my appearance the Sigñor hastily released his pupil's hand, the while the hot blood dyed her face from throat to brow.

"I thought you had departed, Sigñor," I said, "as I failed to hear the music."

"Not so, Miss McFarlane!" he queried, raising his shoulders, as if in astonishment that I should have been deaf to sounds which never existed.

"I made most de mooseck myself," he continued, running his fingers over the keys. "For-

de Signorita *ess* no well, and she has no spirit for *de same*, and then he let those velvet eyes of his rest on Birdie until the colour again mounted to her forehead.

"The hour has long expired. Birdie, you had better go to your room, and lie down till dinner, dear," I said.

She rose at once, thankful as I thought to get away, merely saying her head ached horribly, when, holding out her hand to the Signor, she bade him good-bye, and a moment after the door closed behind her.

He would have followed her example, glad as she, I thought, to get from my presence, had I not begged him to stay.

"You were walking in the lane with my sister last evening, Signor Palazzi," I began, after having motioned him to be seated, dashing into the subject at once, and then waiting to watch the effects of my words.

At first he seemed dumbfounded, and weighed in his mind whether to deny or admit the truth of my assertion.

Perhaps he thought it useless to do the first, so accepted the inevitable, and told me it was so.

"De Signorita did take one little walk, when de paths did meet, and he did say one moment to *me* Mess Birdie a vera good evening, and den he did go on to *de station*, was it wrong?" he asked. "If so he did ask one thousand pardons," and he bowed almost to my feet, while he placed his hand on his heart to assure me a thought of wrong was the farthest from his mind.

"I cannot say so, provided the meeting was an accidental one," I answered, "but you must excuse me saying, Signor, the lateness of the hour made the fact appear strange that you should be so late in the neighbourhood."

He looked at me then, an air of injured innocence passing over his handsome face, the while I thought I could detect the slightest suspicion of a smile lurking around beneath his heavy moustache, and leaving a ray of mischief to escape from his splendid eyes. But the next moment all my doubts had died, and I even apologised for the injustice I thought I had done him.

"You must forgive me, Signor," I said, "but Birdie is young, and owing to the fact that I am in the position of mother to her, it makes me jealous of any harm reaching her."

"With respect to me, Miss McFarlane, you need not one moment's uneasiness. Miss Birdie *ess* one vera bootiful young lady, but Signor Palazzi has one conscience; an while he lives he will act as man of honour."

He had drawn himself up to his full height as these sentiments escaped him, and then placing his hand on his heart, made the best of melodramatic bows.

A short time after he was gone, leaving me in anything but a satisfactory frame of mind, wavering as I was 'twixt the advisability of mentioning my doubts to Birdie, or allowing things to go on as if I had no idea, no thought, that she would deceive me.

My darling did not make her appearance until dinner, and notwithstanding she had exerted every effort to erase the signs of tears, I could not fail to see that she had been weeping.

Such a miserable meal I never sat down to before, during which I had to do all the talking, and then was forced to lapse into silence, unable as I was to continue a solitary conversation further.

"You must excuse me, Gertie!" papa said, "but I feel very ill, child, and seem to have no strength to talk."

"I am so sorry, dear!" I answered. "Have you been over-fatiguing yourself?"

"I don't think so!" he replied; but scarcely had he finished the sentence when a sudden faintness seized him, and I had but time to rush to his assistance when he became as one lifeless, falling back in his chair.

To bathe his hands and forehead with water, aided by Birdie, was the work of a moment, and when he was sufficiently recovered we laid him on the sofa. But although he revived for awhile,

we knew he was far worse than he cared to acknowledge, and two days after he was confined to his bed, and Dr. Clowes in attendance.

It was then that I gave no further thought to Signor Palazzi, my mind too fully occupied in the sick-room to pay any attention to other matters.

I knew the music-lessons were given, for I heard the piano; but the door was kept closed, fearing to disturb the slumbers of the invalid. It was on one of these days—papa had been ill now three weeks—that Birdie came to me, for I had snatched a few moments from the watch I had kept so long by his bedside.

"Can I speak to you now, Gertie?" she asked.

"Nurse is with papa, isn't she?"

"Yes, dear!" I answered, stroking her soft hair, for she had set herself in her favourite place on a stool by my feet. "Is it anything very important?" and I smiled down at the childlike face uplifted to mine, and which had become so rosy-red in those few minutes.

"Yes!" she stammered, "dear, dear Gertie!" she went on. "You won't be very angry, will you," and her eyes looked so pitiful I could only stoop and kiss her in reply.

"I don't suppose it is anything very dreadful my darling!" I said.

She was silent then, nervously plucking at a tassel which adorned her dress, the colour deepening on her fair skin the while.

"I don't think so, Gertie!" she answered, after awhile; "but I am afraid you will be very cross, and her lids, with their deep fringes, drooped until they swept her cheek.

"What is it, Birdie?" I said, impatiently. "If you have anything to tell me you had better do so at once, as any moment I may be called to papa's room."

She covered her face with her hands then, and I saw the tears well through her fingers. In an instant I repented that I had spoken, as I thought, harshly.

"Never mind, darling!" I said, "I did not mean to be unkind," and then I lifted her from her lowly position and nestled her head on my bosom.

"Now, tell me all about it, dear!" I continued.

"I know it was wicked to deceive you, Gertie!" she answered; "but I loved him so much, and he said you would part us, that you would never let me see him any more, and so—so, I told him I would be his wife! and one day I met him. We went a long way, and—and were married!"

"Married!" I exclaimed, in my astonishment, almost throwing her from me.

She was on her feet in a moment, regretting, I could see it in her face, that she had confided to me the story which she had told me between her sobs, in disjointed phrases. The colour had fled from her cheeks, and she had become deadly pale, with a look of defiance on her countenance I had never seen before.

"I am no longer a child, Gertie!" she said, and then, without another word, she swept from the room.

"No longer a child!" I repeated, my heart breaking the while. This, this, for all the tender love and care I had lavished on her! And then my strength gave way, and I sobbed out the grief I could no longer control.

"And who was the man to whom she had given her young life?" I asked. Antonio Palazzi! Yes, Antonio Palazzi! who, but a few weeks since had spoken to me of honour—honour! To creep as a serpent into our paradise! and in my agony I fell on my knees, and cursed him who had brought such trouble to our hitherto happy home.

How long I remained thus I could not tell. The shadows of evening were fast creeping over the room, I alone remaining unconscious of the gathering gloom. As in a dream I heard my father's bell, and felt unable to stir. A thought, a regret I had never felt till now, I could not resist passing through my mind; that it was for this I had sacrificed my youth, my lover, all that was dearest, and this was the end; until in my fancy I conjured up from each darkening corner

the face of the Italian, jeering at me in his triumph, and then the touch of a human hand recalled me to myself, and I lifted my head to see Birdie by my side.

She was still wearing the white dress she had worn that afternoon, and the indistinct light of the dying day was just sufficient to show me the face I loved so fondly, looking so beautiful, as I thought, in that moment that she was going from me.

"I could not go, Gertie, until you had told me you had forgiven me. Not for the step I have taken, dear, but for the unkind way in which I spoke to you—you who have been so good to me. I did not wish to have left until I knew papa was better, but perhaps it is better I should do so; but you won't tell him just yet, Gertie; will you, dear?" she sobbed. "Not until he is strong enough to know that his sunbeam has left for ever."

What I should have replied I can't say, but the door opening suddenly, I roused myself in a moment, Birdie assisting me to my feet, as the housemaid entered the room.

"Oh! miss, do come at once!" she said. "Nurse says she has been ringing the bell you told her to for the last half-hour, and master has got another fit, and she is so frightened."

I required no further incentive to dash aside my tears, and but a few minutes elapsed when I was by my father's bedside.

But the sands of life were quickly running out, Dr. Clowes telling me if it were possible to summon my sisters, not a moment must be lost; but Elsie alone lived within distance to enable her to join us, as we were assembled round his bed.

"Take care of her, Gertie," were his last words, as after bidding us all good-bye, he laid Birdie's hand in mine, and then the film of death gathered over his eyes, and as he passed away I thanked Heaven he had never known the sorrow which I was left to bear alone.

Palazzi's name was never uttered in the days that followed, he even displaying too much respect to our feelings than to intrude upon our sorrow, alone sending by the servant who told him the sad news a message of condolence and then leaving, although I knew it was hard for him to do so without one moment in which he could have nestled to his bosom the lovely head of his young bride, sympathising with her in her distress.

But even with her he seemed to have passed from her memory in the contemplation of this heavy sorrow, and not until we had laid the beloved remains in the same grave which held his child-wife beneath the drooping willow was the subject referred to.

Elsie had returned to her home, and we two alone occupied the White House, which appeared to grow more gloomy each day as the autumn advanced, until I almost wished she had left one or two of her children to enliven us, and I began to anticipate the return of the Signor with delight; even his music, I thought, would at least cheer us, as I had, on consideration, deemed it wiser to bow to the inevitable than to hold out against what now could not be helped, so had agreed that Birdie should write and tell him to make my home his until he had provided one for them both.

"How strange Antonio does not write," Birdie said, when three days had elapsed without bringing any reply.

"Very," I answered, rather nettled that he should thus have treated what I looked upon as an act of concession on my part. "Surely there will be a letter to-morrow!"

But to-morrow came with the same result, I conjuring up in my mind the while all kinds of horrors, and Birdie's sweet face becoming whiter as each morning passed, and no letter.

"Oh! Gertie, what shall I do!" she asked, the tears welling to her beautiful eyes. "I am sure he is ill, and cannot write. I can't bear it—indeed I can't. I must go myself to-morrow if we hear nothing then."

I consented that she should do so if the morning brought no news, and I thought she appeared a trifle happier, although I could see how dread-

fully long the hours seemed to her, with that dreadful fear gaining hold on her imagination.

We were seated in the drawing-room, looking out on the big tree, beneath which we had so often swung in the days of our childhood, its leaves now turning red and yellow with autumn tints. And I was wondering where my next home would be (for the White House, there being no vicarage in the parish, would be required by the new incumbent), when the housemaid entered the room bearing on a silver salver a card which she brought to me.

"It was a lady's, and, in answer to my question being told that the lady herself wished to see me, I gave orders that she should be shown into the library."

The next moment I arose with the intention of following, hoping that Birdie had not seen the name of the stranger, hiding the card, as I thought, from her sight; but, in rising, it must have fallen, for it fluttered to the ground, and before I could recover it, she held it in her hand.

"Madame Palezzl, Gertie!" she ejaculated. "What can it mean?" and then she clung to me as a horrible fear filled her mind.

"His mother, dear," I answered, not knowing how to meet those sad eyes uplifted to mine. "Perhaps he is not well, nothing serious, and she has come to explain why he has not written;" and then I tore myself away from her, for I could not bear the questioning of that mute appeal with that terrible dread taking possession of me; and as the door closed behind me I could hear her sobbing out a grief she appeared to foresee.

CHAPTER V.

"MISS MACFARLANE, I believe!"

It was the stranger who thus spoke, when I entered the room, and she had risen from the seat she had occupied awaiting my presence.

I bowed an assent, a great weight being lifted from my heart as my eyes rested on the lady, who, at my request, resumed her former position.

She was a woman past the meridian of life, the worn face, which could never have been handsome even in its first youth, failing to hide its wrinkles beneath the deep layer of rouge and powder with which it was covered, whilst giving to the eyes a strange yellow appearance, totally at variance with the girlish air she assumed.

One glove was removed, displaying a white, shrivelled hand, the fingers of which were covered to the knuckles with rings, in which the most valuable stones sparkled.

"I trust, Madame Palezzl," I commenced, "that it is no unforeseen trouble which has been the cause of your presence here—that Signor Antonio is not ill!"

"Oh, dear no!" she replied, with a laugh, which grated on my ears, and made her look almost fiendish through her paint, "something far more important than his illness would be has compelled me to intrude on your time."

I bowed again, leading her to understand I was ready to listen to the cause of her visit, the while she appeared to take a delight in tantalising me by not entering on the subject, the excitement of my feelings, which I could ill restrain, apparently affording her the most exquisite pleasure.

All this time I was thinking of Birdie, knowing how much the suspense of awaiting even the worst was causing her to suffer, and this woman evidently reading my thoughts and torturing me accordingly by her reticence.

"My time being valuable, Madame Palezzl," I at last said, with impatience, "you must excuse my asking you to convey, without further delay, the purport of your visit, which I can alone conjecture to be with reference to your son."

No sooner had the words left my lips than I was aware of the mistake I had made, for even beneath her rouge I could see the colour mount to her temples, whilst her yellow eyes shone with a dangerous fire.

"My son!" she blazed forth. "I can only conclude, Miss Macfarlane, you have a desire to insult me, to hide the shame of your sister, who has allowed herself to become the mistress of a married man!"

The abuse she showered upon us both was lost upon me as it came pouring forth from between her false teeth, that one word alone resounding in my ears, she the while telling me how she had found it all out, and then throwing at my feet the letters which my darling, in her innocence, had penned to Antonio, her husband.

At first, in my heart, I cursed him, and then when I lifted my eyes to this woman and read his fate in her cold, pitiless face, I felt a gleam of pity pass over the anger which had at first filled my breast against him.

His wife! I thought. This creature, old and withered, to whom the name of love was mockery, to whom even the title of mother would have deprived it of its sanctity! Could it be true, or was it but the phantasy of some horrible dream?

I arose then, like one in a nightmare, the birds singing their evening hymns in the branches without coming to me as the voices of angels, and I powerless to stir from the spot where, like a demon, this woman stood before me, that laugh again resounding in my ears, until she held out her hand, and with a superhuman effort I roused myself to avoid her touch.

I heard the rustle of her dress when, in answer to my summons, a servant showed her out; and then, as the door closed behind her, the sound awoke me to a sense of my situation, and burying my face in my hands I sobbed aloud in the agony of my grief, in that moment breathing a prayer of thankfulness to Heaven that my father had never known this great sorrow.

How long I remained thus I cannot tell. I knew it must be growing late, for the birds' songs had almost ceased, and the shadows were creeping softly around, filling each nook and corner with fancied forms, and my imagination had become so distended that I almost shranked when a soft hand was laid upon my shoulder.

"Little mother!"

I looked up then; it was Birdie's voice, and the endearing title was the one she ever gave me when she thought she had caused me sorrow.

I tried to hide the traces of the tears I had shed, but notwithstanding the waning light, even in the dying day, they could not escape her observation; and then, in the deep gloom which seemed to gather all at once around us, I told her the story of her wrong.

At first she would not believe, tearing herself passionately from my embrace, and in the moment of her awakening from her love dream even accusing me of a desire to separate her from her lover; but the pain depicted on my face, even in that dim light, seemed to recall her to a sense of the injustice she had done me, and the next moment she had thrown herself in my arms, letting her head, with its wealth of golden hair, rest on my shoulder, sobbing out her grief as she had done in the days gone by, when she had come to me with her child troubles.

"You will take me away, Gertie!" she said. "If I stay here I shall go mad!"

"Yes, dear," I answered; "we will go abroad for awhile, and in new scenes forget all. It seems very dreadful now, Birdie," I continued, stroking the bright, soft hair, "but in a short time my darling will be herself again. You are so young, dearest, and the world is wide."

She looked up at me reproachfully, and then she bid me tell her of his wife.

"Do you think he really loves her, Gertie?" she asked.

I had not told her then how impossible I knew it was, the idea of love in connection with that painted, aged woman, rather desiring her to harbour the feeling that her rival was young and handsome as herself.

"People do not always marry for love, Birdie," I answered. "But that she is his wife she has given me indisputable proofs."

"Yes, yes!" she cried, excitedly; "and I—Gertie, I—was his—"

But I would not let her finish the sentence; it seemed sacrilege to apply such a name to one so pure and innocent as she, so I placed my hand across her pretty mouth, pressing her to my bosom as though she was an infant.

The next day she collected all the presents he

had made her, which she put in a box, together with the golden ring he had placed on her finger but a few weeks since.

"Don't direct it to that address, Birdie," I said, for I saw she was writing the name where Madame Palezzl had intercepted her letters.

"I know of no other, Gertie," she answered, looking up, sadly.

I advanced to where she was sitting with the box before her.

"Would you not like to see him once before we leave England, Birdie?" I asked.

She turned to me then, a gleam of gratitude and love shining from her beautiful eyes, suffused as they were with mused tears, and I knew how thankful she was that I had said this.

"Dear little mother!" she answered, smothering my hand, which she had captured, with kisses; and so we agreed that an advertisement should be inserted in the *Times* that he alone would understand.

But a fortnight passed without eliciting any response, each day the same announcement appearing, and we were about to give it up in despair, our time for remaining at the White House having nearly expired.

From sympathy with my feelings had turned to anger against him for the despicable part I considered Antonio had played towards my darling, and I began even to feel irritable with her for continuing to harbour any affection for this man, the while I hurried our departure forward.

"I shall be glad to leave England," I said, when Ella and Mabel came for the last time to bid us good-bye, a sentiment which gave no little offence, they not only denouncing me as the least affectionate sister they ever heard of, but declared, between themselves, they believed me not quite right, touching their foreheads the while in a significant way.

I only smiled when, looking in the glass unknown to them, I had witnessed these dumb motions, and then I bidden them an affectionate adieu.

The next morning Birdie and I were awake early. We had neither of us slept much, our minds too full of the change which was about to take place in our lives.

We both regretted having to bid farewell to the old White House and its surroundings, endeared to us as they were by our childhood's associations; and to the last moment on that evening preceding our departure we together watched, as we had so often done before, for the last golden rays of the setting sun, as he sank to rest in the west, a strange and stillness pervading all around, each leaf silent, apparently not caring to whisper to each other, as was their wont, in the soft eventide.

We had placed the disposal of our furniture in the hands of an agent, who had sold it to the incoming tenant, who was to take possession the day after our departure.

"Lock each door Jane, and let Mrs. Humphreys have charge of the keys," I was saying, whilst making the last arrangement for our journey.

"Yes, miss," the girl, answered between her sobs, for she had lived with us as housemaid ever since she left her mother's roof, and was now breaking her heart to think she had to seek other service, when a loud knock at the hall-door caused us both to start.

"Whoever it is, show them into the drawing-room," I said; and a few minutes after she returned, with a strange look on her face, to tell me it was a gentleman who wanted to see me, but he would not send in his card.

"Attend to Miss Birdie," I said, moving towards the door, my heart fluttering the while, as a hope I did not express to my darling took possession of my mind.

I turned a moment, and I knew the same hope was hers, for the colour had suddenly risen to her temples, and she had of late grown so pale, a light of joyous expectation leaping unconsciously to her beautiful eyes.

The visitor was standing looking out on the grass plot, with the space brown and bare beneath the large chestnut tree where the swing

had once hung, mostly covered now with dead leaves, red and yellow, chasing each other before the autumnal wind.

He was doubtless deep in thought, for the handle of the door turning he started visibly, and then he came forward to meet me. It was Signor Palazzi! At first I restrained from holding my hand to him, but a something in the expression of his face caused me to falter in my determination. He looked so panic-stricken, so utterly miserable, that I could not but pity him, feeling, as I recalled to my mind my visitor of a few weeks back, that the knowledge that she was his wife was sufficient punishment for any man.

"Heaven bless you for this, Miss Macfarlane!" he said, in his broken English, grasping my hand the while; and when he released it I found it wet with his tears.

"Signor Palazzi?" I answered, "you have done us the greatest wrong it was possible to do; but, before entirely condemning you, I consider it but just to offer you the opportunity of explaining your conduct, as I could not believe you to be so utterly base as your actions signify."

I paused then, the while I could see a ray of hope had entered into his breast.

"May I speak, then?" he asked, bowing low in his accustomed manner; and I was about to give my consent when a slight sound without caused me to rise, and I opened the door to find Birdie there.

"Don't be cross, Gertie," she said, in a whisper, "but I thought—I was sure—it was his voice, and I could not help listening."

I made no reply, only leading her within, at the same time that she would then have held back; but it was too late, he had seen her, and in another moment she was hanging round his neck.

"Birdie, sit down," I said, in the same breath that I had commanded Antonio to release her. "Surely your pride will not permit you to throw yourself into Signor Palazzi's arms until he has exonerated himself from his most unpardonable conduct?"

I spoke so sternly that she regarded me in amazement; and then, without a word, moved towards the chair I indicated, he the while standing where she left him, like a chidden child.

CHAPTER VI.

A FEW moments elapsed, he still remaining with his eyes riveted on the carpet, as though intently studying the pattern portrayed thereon, Birdie the while having brought her chair close to mine, until her fair head was resting on my shoulder.

"I would rather you would be seated, Signor," I said; "and as we have proposed leaving Wincanton by the 4 P.M. train, you must excuse my asking you to hasten whatever communication you have to make."

He bowed in response, although I could see he seemed startled when I mentioned our intended departure; and then, in broken English, rendered more difficult owing to the excitement under which he was labouring, he began:—

"Mine is an unhappy history" he commenced. "I was but a boy, when, for some political crime, my father was banished his native country. He was a noble there, and as young as I was I shall never forget the emotion he betrayed when he thought to leave his beautiful land for ever. To him England seemed unbearable with her cold, grey skies and bitter east winds; but the hope which reigns eternal in the human breast never forsook him that when he closed his eyes in death, it would be beneath the blue heavens of his beloved Italy."

"As I grew in years, through me he seemed to divine that this hope would be realised, and when at nineteen I expressed my wish and intention, could I do so, to study music, for which I had an extraordinary talent, in that country, he said he would move Heaven and earth but that he would gratify my desire. We were very poor; my father's goods with his estates

having been confiscated for his crime, and it was with the talent I possessed that I looked forward to reinstate the fortunes of our fallen house. A few months after I bade adieu to my only parent, and found myself beneath an Italian sky, and I no longer wondered at the lifelong regret with which my father remembered his sunny home.

"In the course of my professional studies I was called upon to perform in the house of a noble Marchesa, and when the guests had departed, and I with my fellow artists were about to retire, I was requested to appear before the noble hostess.

"My features seemed so familiar to her, she said, that she desired to know my real name, feeling assured that the one I had assumed was merely a *nom de guerre*. I admitted that it was so, that my father's name was Palazzi.

"Palazzi!" she replied, a shade passing over her countenance, and then she asked other questions, until she arrived at the fact, from my answer, that she was not mistaken, that I was, indeed, the son of her oldest friend.

"From that time I became almost a daily visitor at the palace of the Marchesa di Barbone, until, instead of the enjoyment which these visits had given me, a terrible fear came over me. I became but too well aware that the Marchesa was falling in love with me—me, but a youth of twenty summers, and she a woman whose years doubled mine.

"At first I deemed I must be mistaken. The caresses she bestowed on me, the signs of affection she gave me, could be but those of a mother for a son, and in that belief I still lounged in her saloons, sang the songs she loved best, and became the recipient of the favours she showered upon me.

"And does not your father still sigh for his Italian home, Antonio?" she asked me one day, when, as usual, I was thus basking in her smile.

"It is his only prayer," I answered, "that he may at least be buried beneath the blue skies he loves so well."

"He shall live, not die only, in his beautiful Italy," she replied. She spoke so passionately that I almost started from the cushion where I sat at her feet, whilst she toyed with my hair, and then I told her how impossible it would be, for the moment he set foot on his native soil it would be to endure a life-long imprisonment.

"Foolish boy!" she answered, and then she told me how she had influence at Court, and that she would obtain his pardon that he might return a free man.

"I can do it, Antonio!" she said, smiling, "but—" and then she suddenly stopped, and although I pressed her to finish her sentence she declined.

"A few weeks after, however, I received a letter from my father. I was to return to England without delay, and when I told the Marchesa that I was going away she parted with me most kindly, 'hoping,' she said, 'that we should soon meet again.'

"I was dumfounded, notwithstanding, to hear on my arrival in London that in that short interval which had taken place since I was in the palace of the Marchesa, that the promise she then made had been fulfilled. My father was a free man, his lands and his title restored; but go to Heaven, at what a price!"

Signor Palazzi ceased speaking now, his mind evidently returning to the bitter memories of the past; and then, as his eyes fell on Birdie nestling close to my side, I could see the tears gathering beneath his long lashes, the while he raised his hand to hide them from her.

"I was to take the Marchesa as my bride," he continued. "At first I laughed right out, thinking that it must be but a joke on my father's part; but, alas! I learnt that it was too true. At the cost of my own liberty, at the sacrifice of the most holy of human passions, it was that he was to be restored to home and riches."

"That woman my wife!" I stormed. "Never,

father. Rather would I die a beggar, and bury you in a pauper's grave beneath English soil."

"But in time he so worked on my feelings, than under the impression that I could not be more wretched than I was then I consented to his wishes; the only gratification I experienced was the gratitude and pleasure which beamed from his aged eyes when I told him of my determination to carry out my part of the programme according to his desire.

"A month after, and we saw the white cliffs of Albion fade from our view. We were going home—home, to him; to me—to worse than death.

"It was a grand wedding, as became that of the only son of the noble Signor de Palazzi, and la Marchesa di Barbone;" and here Antonio laughed, a cruel-hard laugh, which grated on the ears of his hearers.

"At first I was moody," he continued, "and in no way hid how the chains were eating into my soul, and destroying all that was good in my nature. Then I determined on another course. I launched into every vice that presented itself to me, in one night scone losing almost a fortune at the gambling-table, until I was, through my debauchery, becoming the very wreck of my former self.

"It was then my father died, and my conscience told me that I had by my conduct hastened his end. Maybe it was not so, but I was not so far lost but that the small still voice aroused me to a sense of the degradation to which this downward course was leading me; and over the tomb of my dead parent I made a vow to lead a better life, and I believe, under the influence of a good woman, I should have kept that vow; but my wife made my life a perpetual torment. Her reproaches, her jealousy drove me to distraction, and in a moment of anger, after a scene between us, which was now of daily occurrence, I took an oath never to enter beneath the roof which covered her again. I kept my word. The next day I sailed for England. I realised but a few hundreds of the wealth which was hers and mine, and then I determined by my profession to make, if not a name, at least a livelihood."

"And yet knowing you were a married man, Signor, you not only engaged the affections of my sister, but you went through the form of marriage with her!" I said.

"Oh! Gertie, spare him," Birdie cried, clinging to me, for I could not control my indignation at what I considered was his disgraceful conduct.

But he did not speak for a few moments, and then, with a sound resembling a moan like one in pain, he turned to her.

"Heaven bless you, my darling!" he said, "and as my heart is now breaking for you, my Birdie, my sweet love, Heaven bear me witness, when I led you to the altar, I thought I was a free man."

He then drew a paper from his breast-pocket. It was an Italian journal, dated six months since, in which was announced the death of the Marchesa di Palazzi, after reading which, he told us how she had followed him to London, there employing agents to discover his every movement, and owing to some communication brought to her, how she had caused the announcement of her own demise to appear in the journal, which was forwarded to him by an unknown friend. It was the revenge which she had told him was most sweet to her, which she had wreaked on him the while she knew, by so doing, her rival would not go unscathed, as not until she had allowed him in blissful ignorance to make her as he thought his wife would she disclose the fact that she still lived.

"My darling! my darling! say that you forgive me!" he pleaded, throwing himself on his knees at the feet of Birdie, who had buried her head on his shoulder. "I will go away, dearest, far, far away, until that day arrives when I can call you, as you are in Heaven's sight, my own true bride. We are both young, and until we can again meet as man and wife I will remain true to the memory of your love. Look up, Birdie, and in your strength give me strength to bear this trouble," he went on, the while I could

see the sweat like drops of water fall from his forehead.

"Let it be so, Signor," I interfered. "Birdie will, with me, leave England for awhile, and relying on your word as a gentleman, that you will in no way influence her movements, until, as a free man, you can claim her as your wife, we will keep you acquainted with our intentions and different address."

He arose then, drawing Birdie towards him in one passionate embrace; and then he imprinted hot, burning kisses on her lips and brow, after which he held her for one moment aloof, feasting his eyes on her beauty, and then, with a strong effort, he tore himself from her.

"Good-bye, Miss Macfarlane," he said, holding out his hand to me, hot and burning as it was, whilst the veins on his forehead seemed swollen to bursting with the suffering he was undergoing.

He was gone then, the door closing between him and all he held most dear; and when the sound of his last footsteps had died away I turned to where Birdie still stood.

But there were now no tears in her beautiful eyes, only a dull, dead look of despair overspread her whole features, and when I spoke merely a sound like a dry sob escaped her lips.

"Don't look like that, Birdie!" I said; but she only smiled a sad, weary smile; and then, with one more fond look at the garden we were leaving for ever, where the dead leaves were now chasing each other over grass and grave, and the wind was moaning amid the bare branches, I led her from a room which was no longer ours.

CHAPTER VII.

We were a short time after on our way to London, where we intended to remain that night, and proceed to Dover the day following, from whence we were to cross to Calais.

I had hoped in the bustle and excitement of travelling that my darling would in part forget the scene through which she had just passed; but notwithstanding that not a sob, a sigh even, betrayed the emotion she was inwardly undergoing, I but too well knew the agony of mind she was enduring.

The dull, dead pain which showed itself from those eyes which could not deceive went to my heart, and I prayed almost that she might be able to find relief in the tears which would not come.

To all my inquiries if she felt ill, she was quite well she would reply, and even at times would make an effort to smile on my drawing her attention to any object by which I hoped to attract her from her all-absorbing sorrow; but it was an unnatural, hollow laugh, so unlike the ripple of music which would emanate from her coral lips that it pained me to hear.

She would gaze in astonishment at the swarm of human life in the busy streets through which we passed, each back bearing its burden of sorrow as each went on in the motley throng.

"An accident, ma'am," the driver of the cab in which we were informed me, referring to a crowd of people almost blocking the thoroughfare, respecting the cause of which I had inquired, having arrived at our destination.

An elderly lady had been run over, someone told him, and they didn't know what she was killed.

"Well, we will get down here, cabby," I said, for it was only two doors further on, the hotel where we intended to alight.

"Here you are, governor," a boy said to one of the policemen, who had now arrived on the scene, and had given directions to fetch a cab, when he saw ours was now empty, a box or two alone remaining to be removed from the top; and as the last one was carried into the hotel I could see them bearing what appeared to be the lifeless form of a woman to the empty vehicle.

Curiosity, maybe a power stronger, caused me to advance to the spot.

"Allow me," I said, and without assigning any reason I moved through the space which was voluntarily cleared for me, merely telling the

policeman, who turned rather angrily on me, I thought I had left my bag on the seat of the empty vehicle, and then I saw that which made my blood leap through my veins.

The next moment I told the men not to convey the injured lady to the hospital, but to carry her within the hotel, where I would be responsible for everything, provided a doctor was sent for without delay.

They hesitated for one moment, but on my returning with the landlord, who said it was all right, they followed my directions. And so they carried her within, laying her gently on the bed of the room where they placed her, a few minutes only elapsing before a doctor was in him tired but seemingly happy.

Between him and his late unjust guardian as his little bare feet, his stout heart and youthful pluck could accomplish.

Weary and footsore, but with courage unabated, he sought the house of a prosperous farmer. It was harvest time, and the farmer engaged him at fourteen marks a month with board. His work on the farm consisted in following after a cutting machine and binding the cut wheat into sheaves, and thus he continued working for two years.

At this early period in his history he began to develop those wonderful qualities for conscientious work that later laid the foundation of his fame and fortune. For while the labour was hard it was faithfully performed, and each night found him tired but seemingly happy.

All this was soon upset, however, and came about in this way:—There was another boy on the farm who was neither so active nor so conscientious a worker, but who was larger and stronger and for this received two marks more a month than young Bailey. This inequality and feeling of injustice wrought upon the spirit of our young adventurer and eventually led to ill-feeling and a personal conflict in which the bigger, stronger and better paid boy was worsted. This spirited contest and victory, however, did not reconcile him to his condition in the country, and he forsook the farm, and taking to the road once more, was soon on his way, for the second time, in search of his fortune.

After walking half the day he reached the city of Pontiac, Michigan, when he boldly walked through the streets and entering the leading hotel, sought the landlord and asked for employment. The landlord was a kindly disposed host, and recognizing the pluck and self-reliance of the little applicant before him, was so favourably impressed that he immediately enrolled him as bell-boy.

While in this position a circumstance occurred that shaped the whole future life of the plucky little fellow. He was so attentive to his duties that he attracted the favourable notice of the landlord and made many friends of the patrons of the hotel, by his cleverness and thorough

attention to business. Prompt to time, regular in attendance, faithful, scrupulously honest, quick, active and bright, he early manifested those qualities which have distinguished him above all through life, and the development of which have made him what he is, the "Premier of Showmen."

The bell-boy won, not only the interest of the proprietor and clerks, but attracted the attention of others, and among the latter was Fred. Bailey, general agent of the Robinson and Lake circus.

This gentleman was not long in discovering the cleverness and valuable business qualities of the little fellow, which gave such excellent promise of unusual ability in the man, and he resolved to secure the services of so promising a lad.

This occurred on the 17th of June, 1860, now forty years ago, and the circus that he joined was a small tent show, of which, as stated, his new employer was the general agent. It was, though, one of the most important shows travelling through the country at that time.

Consequential as it was, however, its entire expenses were probably not more than 1,200 marks per day. The outlay of the Barnum and Bailey show of to-day aggregates something like fifty times that sum.

The Robinson and Lake circus carried, perhaps, ten or twelve performers, and as both the proprietors and several members of their immediate families

were also performers, as was the Invariable custom of showmen in those days, the salary list was therefore a brief one. Robinson and his boys were bareback riders and Lake's wife did a Manège act, it is said, a very pretty turn on the back of a padded palfrey—the padded palfrey being one of the dead and gone features of the modern show.

When the firm of Robinson and Lake dissolved, Mr. Bailey cast his lot with the Lake interest and so remained until he resigned to take a position in a theatre in Nashville, Tennessee. This was in 1863.

Among his multiform duties were those of outdoor advertising during the day, posting bills, &c., and at night selling tickets and occasionally seating the people. In other words, he was local manager (except in the matter of booking

THE WORLD'S GREATEST SHOWMAN.

—10:—

The career of James Anthony Bailey, who is now and has been for twenty years past the head and front of the Greatest Show on Earth, illustrates the proposition that has often found illustration before—that the human being who starts in life with a determination to succeed and permits nothing to swerve him from the purpose is bound to achieve success, if he lives and is endowed with ordinary abilities.

J. A. Bailey was born in Detroit, in the State of Michigan, United States. He is now just fifty-three years of age. Until the death of his father, and for some time thereafter, he lived at home, employing his days similar to other boys, at school and otherwise until his mother's death, which event took place a year or so after that of his father. He was thus left an orphan at the age of nine years and came under the guardianship of a brother-in-law, an indifferent and ungenial man. This guardian was so unjust that the youth determined to run away, and did so, but instead of going to sea as many boys did at that period in American history, he sought and obtained other honourable employment on shore.

The chief cause of his leaving home came about in this wise. He had many things given him to do by his guardian at home in the morning before he left for school. Such duties were always most faithfully performed in every detail, but it invariably caused him to be late at his lessons, and too proud to offer excuses to the teacher he was frequently punished by the schoolmaster for being late, and as often kept in the schoolhouse as additional punishment after the other boys had gone to their homes. That caused him to arrive home late in the evenings, and again, rather than tell the true reasons compelling his delay, which would expose the primary cause of the trouble, which was the work he had to do each morning, would suffer a second punishment at the hands of his guardian. And so it went on for a long time. These injustices, however, he determined he would no longer submit to, and so, after fully considering the matter in his youthful head, he ran away as stated.

When he left the former home of his parents his cash assets amounted to two marks in silver and a knife with one broken and one good blade. With them, and a deep seated sense of the injustices he had suffered, as capital to begin life with, the little boy, now a little hero, trudged along the country road with but a single idea in his head—to place as much ground as possible

attractions), ticket seller, usher, advertiser and bill poster, all of which duties he performed for the sum of 56 marks per week, 40 marks of which he was obliged to pay for his board. It was at the time of the great Civil War in America, when in the Southern States everything was high except salaries.

It was here a circumstance arose which, for a time, determined the career of our young hero. One night the theatre was crowded and there were no good seats to be had. A certain Mr. A. H. Green, a wealthy army contractor and sutler, came there, and finding the crowded condition of the house, asked young Bailey to get him a good seat. He was promptly provided with one, and in return for the exceptional courtesy slipped a five dollar bill (twenty marks) into Bailey's hand. It was instantly returned with the remark, "I thank you, sir, but I am paid by the manager for this duty, and cannot accept your money." Mr. Green was so struck by this action that he next day looked up the manager of the theatre, asked what salary was paid to young Bailey, and made him an offer of double the amount to accept a position with him, which was accepted.

Our young hero was now in receipt of one hundred and twelve marks per week, and while in the employment of Mr. Green as sutler's clerk with the army of General Sherman, saw the series of battles in the famous advance of that great general from Chattanooga to Atlanta. Many hairbreadth escapes he had, too, while thus employed; for with all the daring that subsequently characterised him in after years in his own business, he undertook to deliver letters to the soldiers on picket duty. To accomplish this he had to crawl on his stomach from rock to tree, from mound to pit, to prevent being shot by the enemy's pickets, and thus he would make his way far into the advance lines at the extreme front. To avoid being mistaken by the pickets of his own side, as he cautiously approached them, he would wave aloft the letters he was carrying, which, being observed, the pickets would advance to meet the daring youth. His journey back to camp would be equally as hazardous, and required the exercise of great caution, for the accuracy of the enemy's sharpshooters was something to be dreaded. Once while employed in this perilous service a bullet struck the letters as he held them up. It was a narrow escape.

Just previous to his now celebrated march to the sea, General Sherman ordered all surplus material of every kind back, and Mr. Bailey returned in charge of a large quantity of stores—the property of his employer—to Chattanooga, where he remained four months. He then proceeded to Cincinnati, Ohio, to buy goods, and there again fell in with his old employer, Mr. Lake, of circus fame. Again he was offered a position in the advance, and accepted it, to take effect the following spring. Mr. Green, the Sutler, learned of this arrangement with regret, and made every honourable effort to retain the clerk he thought so much of, and who had endeared himself to him by his sterling qualities of head and heart, using such inducements and persuasions as caused Mr. Bailey to seek a release from Mr. Lake. The latter gentleman, however, had no such thought as relinquishing his claim. Still less would Mr. Bailey falsify his word or break an engagement from which he had not honourably been discharged. Accordingly, he soon came again into the old circus business of his youth, for which he had already shown such aptitude.

Mr. Bailey continued with Mr. Lake until that gentleman went out of business in 1869.

It is a significant fact, that although Mr. Bailey made great progress from that time on, it was not until the year 1870 that he engaged in what might be considered a great enterprise. The presumption is, that he was maturing plans for the future and making those improvements which are to-day such conspicuous features with his Greatest Show on Earth. Be that as it may, the great enterprise he first appears to have shown it was the carrying to Australia of a fully equipped American circus, and that was the big Cooper and Bailey Show. It was a long time before he could convince his conservative partner that such

an enterprise would prove remunerative, but he finally did convince him and overcame all scruples and doubts, and the American circus was introduced in Australia and made a most magnificent success.

Euthusiastic over the triumph achieved, as it fully confirmed the arguments and opinion advanced to Mr. Cooper, the tour of the show was continued to New Zealand, Tasmania, India, and South America, but in the later country, for various reasons, and owing to local conditions then existing, the show was not as great a success as in the other countries, and so it returned home to New York in 1879, after three years' absence.

About this time a big firm of printers in New York had been compelled to take over a large show, in lieu of money owed them for printing, and believing so much in the wonderful capacity, experience and managerial ability of Mr. Bailey, they made over the show in their hands to him simply on his individual promise to pay. Mr. Bailey now consolidated his new acquisition with the Cooper and Bailey show, and thus became the half-owner and manager of the largest show in the United States, even surpassing in magnitude the great circus of P. T. Barnum.

Mr. Bailey had now distanced all competitors save one, P. T. Barnum, and he now felt strong enough to give battle to this veteran showman upon the latter's chosen ground. For once in the season a terrific war was waged for supremacy between these two big rival amusement enterprises. Vast sums of money were expended by both shows, and the warfare threatened to be ruinous financially to all concerned. For once Mr. Barnum had met his superior in the business which he had made famous, and for the first time had suffered defeat. For Mr. Bailey had caused him to abandon his selected territory and fly to remote sections of the country with his show.

There was one most important factor in this now celebrated war of the big shows. A short time before hostilities began, one of Mr. Bailey's large female elephants gave birth to a baby. This, by the way, was the first baby elephant ever born in captivity. It proved an immense card for Mr. Bailey. The birth of the animal was chronicled far and wide over the country, and rendered the name and fame of Cooper and Bailey famous all over the land. Mr. Barnum, quick to see the advantage of having so important an attraction as a real live American baby elephant, telegraphed to his rival, Mr. Bailey, as follows: "Will give for your baby elephant 400,000 marks." Mr. Bailey wired in answer, "Will not sell at any price."

Mr. Barnum died in 1891, and a couple of years later Mr. Bailey purchased all the rights and interest of the heirs, so that he now became the absolute owner, as he was formerly one-half partner, and sole manager of the Greatest Show on Earth.

The next seven years found Mr. Bailey running his show in America, with the added prestige of its successful London season, to overwhelming business, but, like Alexander, he sighed for new worlds to conquer. Again his resourceful mind came to his aid, and another European trip was determined upon. Undeterred by the magnitude of the venture, as demonstrated upon his first journey to London, he again entered into negotiations for the transportation of the big show, and a second time it was successfully accomplished, the opening exhibition taking place, as upon the first trip, in Olympia in December, 1897.

Another monster success was scored, and in the spring a tour of the provinces of Great Britain undertaken. A most phenomenal triumph in every way greeted the tour. The next winter witnessed a repetition of the former success in London, and again in the spring of last year a second tour of the provinces was made with a duplication of the extraordinary business of the first travelling season in that country.

From what has already been written, the world will understand that in Mr. James A. Bailey he has one of the most indefatigable of workers, whose activity and endurance is phenomenal, while the number of his performances, coupled

with infiniteness of attention to every part, has never been paralleled and seems all but incredible.

For this man and multi-millionaire work is life, blood, breath and meat. This bundle of concrete, nervous energy, and phenomenal activity, is a man below medium height, of slight build, gentle voice, and most modest and unassuming manners. Though alert, keen, quick-witted, prompt and decisive, there is about him nothing in the least loud or boastful, but, on the contrary, he can scarcely be brought to speak of himself or of his achievements at all, and seems retiring to the point of diffidence. It is not Mr. Bailey but the great show for which he seems to labour and to live. Questions involving millions are decided on the moment and with success or failure hanging on the decision. His capacity for work is marvelous, and frequently (as the writer of this well knows of his own knowledge) wears out men in the best of health not half his age. No millionaire anywhere on earth works so hard, and therein lies the true secret of all his pleasures. Other wealthy men embark on excursions of pleasure, in yachting, hunting, sight-

seeing. Mr. Bailey works, not because he has to, but because he wants to. He wears no jewellery, dresses in good taste, does no bragging, and keeps his own counsel. He is distinguished also for being the least boastful of any man ever achieving success in the show business. He doesn't care a rap whether people know of his personal triumphs or not, all he cares for is the elevation of his show. In that he is Barnum's antithesis.

His generosity is as unbounded as the magnitude of his enterprises, while his benefactions are as countless as the stars on the brightest night. The army of people in his employ he looks upon as in a great degree his especial charge, and they in return consider him the most generous of employers—the best of friends. And that happy relationship has existed for many years, a living testimonial to the worth of the great and good man who rose, unaided, from a bell-boy in a hotel to the proud position of the greatest showman that ever lived.

[THE END.]

CLIFFE COURT.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

THE doctor's prophecy proved correct. Two days later, when he went to the Court, he found his patient all anxiety to communicate to him the result of her retrospect.

"What you said seemed to give me a sort of key to it, sir," she said, putting her knitting down, and giving all her attention to her subject; "and I puzzled and puzzled over it until things became clear. Margaret Sumner was the proper name of the girl who was with us, only we always called her Daisy. My sister, Janet, never liked her, because, you see, sir, she was so very pretty, and Janet herself set up for being a beauty; and while we were making the voyage, I remember an affair happened that made Janet quite hate her. It was a matter of a sweetheart—some young man on board made love to Janet, and she fell—or fancied she fell—head over ears in love with him; so they got engaged, and then, when he saw Daisy—who had remained in her cabin for the first week or so—he was so taken with her beauty that he transferred his affections, and Janet would have it that Daisy tried to attract him—which I am sure she did not. However, my sister never forgave her, and vowed she would be revenged—and she kept her word."

The speaker paused a moment, but her hearer did not speak for fear of interrupting the continuity of her reminiscences, and in a little while she went on,—

"When we arrived at Melbourne Daisy got a situation as governess in a family, and my brother met with an accident, which made it impossible for him to go up-country, as he had

formerly determined, so we had to stay with him, and do the best we could. A few months later he died, and then Janet and I were thrown on our own resources, and obliged to get a living for ourselves, for we had neither the money nor the inclination to go back to England; we therefore took situations in shops, which kept us employed all day—although it was an employment that neither of us liked.

"Meanwhile Daisy had met with a former lover, whom she had known in England, and who married her, and they both went away to a sheep-farm that he had taken. A little while afterwards she wrote and asked if Janet and I would care to go to them, as her husband could give us both employment in spinning wool, and we were only too glad to go. When we arrived Daisy told me that her husband desired to keep their marriage secret from his friends in England, who were very rich people, and that, in obedience to his wishes, she had not mentioned it to her aunt and uncle, who fancied she was still acting as governess in Melbourne. The enforced secrecy seemed to grieve her a good deal, but she was so utterly devoted to her husband that his slightest fancy was law, and as she did not wish us to mention the marriage, of course we did not do so—indeed, we soon dropped all correspondence with our English friends, for we had not left behind us anyone we particularly cared for. Well, time went on, and little boy was born to Daisy, who was christened 'Hubert,' and soon afterwards Janet had an offer of marriage from a sheep farmer, living some distance away, and she accepted, and became his wife. I went with her to her new home, and we lost sight of Daisy and her husband, for after a little while we moved farther up country. Some years later, we heard that she had died directly after we last saw her, and that her husband had only survived her a year or two, and then we learned nothing more about them.

"Our life was a busy, hard-working one, and we had not much time to think of anything but our work, especially after the death of Janet's husband, when we were left to shift for ourselves. We didn't get on very well, and it was just as much as we could do to keep going. However, we managed it somehow, and about two years ago my sister fell ill, and I had to give up my work to nurse her. They were very hard times that followed; we were as poor as we could be, for we had not managed to save money, and there was no one to whom we could apply for help, so you may fancy that our condition was not an enviable one. From the first I knew Janet could not recover, for she was suffering from an internal disease, for which there was no cure, and gradually it dawned upon me that not only was she suffering physically, but that she had something on her mind which tormented her almost as much as the pain itself. Several times I asked her what it was, but she answered me angrily, telling me to mind my own business; so at last I determined to say no more about it, and it was she herself who next mentioned the subject. One night she was very much worse, and thought she was dying, and then she said—

"Esther, you were right in your suspicions about having something on my mind; it has weighed upon me like a burden for a long time."

"Then why don't you get rid of it?" I asked, for I was always of a practical turn of mind, and never wasted time beating about the bush. She sighed, and didn't speak for some minutes, then she said, energetically,—

"I will get rid of it; at all events, I will tell it to you, and you may, perhaps, make reparation. It is not nice to talk of one's bad deeds, Esther—one thinks nothing of them while one is strong and healthy; but when one comes to lie on a bed of sickness, they rise up, and look altogether different. It seems to me that I never used to stay to think, and if an idea of death ever came I used to dismiss it, as if it were something very far off indeed. It looks quite near now, and I know I shall have to face it before very long—even now I feel its grim shadow falling upon me. I wonder if there is any truth in a death-bed repentance!"

"Certainly there is," I told her, "repentance, whenever it comes, must be acceptable to Heaven."

"I wish I could think so!" she sighed; and then, after a little while, she told me a secret that she had kept for many years. It seemed that she had never forgiven Daisy for supplanting her in the affections of her former lover, and while we were living in her house, Janet had overheard a conversation between her and her husband. He had brought in news of the burning of the church in which their wedding took place, and, as he told it to his wife, he said,—"You must take care of those certificates, Daisy, for the clergyman who married us, and the old woman who witnessed the ceremony, are both dead, and if anything happened to the certificate, we should have no means of proving the marriage."

"This made a great impression on Janet, and she contrived to find out where Daisy kept the documents; after that it was easy enough to abstract them, and it appeared that for all these years they had been in her possession.

"Perhaps Daisy never discovered the loss," I said to comfort her.

"Very likely not," she responded, "but don't you see the influence the absence of those certificates would have on her son? If he were entitled to property he could not claim it, for he could not prove his right to it." This was what had been tormenting her; and so at last I promised to go to England, and take the documents with me. After her death there would be nothing to keep me in Australia, and it struck me that perhaps Hubert Cliffe, if he were alive, might find me some employment in return for the service I should render him.

"My sister did not last very long, but before her death she gave me the papers, which I, for security, stitched up in a linen bag, and hung round my neck."

The doctor gave a great start, remembering how he had said that the bag probably contained love-letters or some rubbish of that sort. Esther Grant did not heed him, but went on,—

"I sold what few things I had, and by that means contrived to gain enough money to get back to England, but the very first night of my arrival my purse, containing all I had, was stolen from me, so I was left entirely destitute, and had to dispose of some of my small stock of clothes in order to get bread. It was a hard struggle to get to Cliffe, but I resolved that no difficulties should daunt me, for I determined the wrong committed by my sister should be righted; and as I tramped along, across the country, I used to find myself repeating the two names, concerning which you asked the other day—Alec Cliffe and Margaret Sumner. I don't rightly remember the full particulars of that journey, for it seems to me more like a dream than anything else, and all that is distinct is the weariness and pain I endured from want of nourishment—for I used to go for days sometimes without anything to eat."

Dr. Fletcher patted her kindly on the shoulder.

"Don't distress yourself by trying to recall these painful reminiscences, my good woman," he said; "they were bad days, but they are over now, and you may rest assured they will never recur again. I can answer for it that Hubert Cliffe will not see you want, for your information is most valuable to him. Now about these certificates—are they still about your person?"

"Yes, sir, for the bag has never been taken from me."

"You had better give them to me," said the doctor, who was all impatience to 'bother them, "and I will at once render them up to their rightful owner."

"But is there not a Lord Cliffe?" asked Esther Grant, looking puzzled. "I understood, when I was making inquiries, that Alec Cliffe's elder brother was owner of the estate."

"So he was a few months ago, but he is dead, and his nephew could not claim the title for want of those very papers you hold at the present moment—so you see of what great importance they are."

The woman drew from her dress the linen bag, and cutting the string that held it round her neck, passed it to Dr. Fletcher, who, with a few strokes of his penknife, slit the linen from top to bottom.

Out of it fell a little bunch of faded flowers. For a few seconds the doctor and his patient gazed at them in stupefied silence.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed the former, at last, rising angrily from his seat, "are there two bags, or have you deceived me?"

"Neither, sir—I am as much astonished as yourself—more, if possible"—was the earnest response. "This is the identical bag in which I sewed up the paper; the linen is peculiar, and I could swear to it if necessary."

"But what brings these trumpery leaves inside?"

"That I cannot tell. I did not put them there."

Evidently she was telling the truth, for she bore the doctor's keen scrutiny without flinching; and he, who was accustomed to reading character, at once decided in favour of her veracity. The affair was a mystery.

"You are sure you put the papers inside?" he queried.

"Sure—quite sure! Why, sir, you don't think I should undertake a journey from Australia here on a fool's errand if I knew it, do you?"

"Why, no, it is not likely; but still, here is the fact before us. You said the bag contained documents, and when we open it we find, instead, some withered roses."

Esther Grant looked utterly bewildered.

"I can't deny it, sir; but, all the same, am unable to explain it. This much I am sure of, that when I was brought to Cliffe Court the documents were safely inside the bag. It is since I have been here they have been changed."

Dr. Fletcher sat down again and considered. He was inclined to think this last assertion must be true; but who could have been the thief?

He reckoned over in his mind all the people who had seen the sick woman—Arline, the nurse, Lady De Roubalx, and Lord Cliffe. The first was beyond suspicion, the second would have no motive for such an act; and, besides, he knew her as a thoroughly honest and trustworthy woman, so there only remained Clarice and Lord Cliffe.

"It is that infernal French countess!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "She is capable of doing anything that will serve her purpose. Good heavens! suppose she has destroyed the certificates!"

In that case all their pains would be of no avail, for the unsupported testimony of this woman who had been found tramping the highway, and taken pity upon by the Viscount, would be laughed to scorn by a court of justice; and, according to her own testimony, the church in which the marriage was solemnised, together with the records, was burnt to the ground years ago.

The doctor called to mind how he had found Lady De Roubalx taking upon herself the duties of nurse, and how surprised he had been at so inexplicable a taste on the part of a fine lady. Later on he remembered giving her the laudanum, and now he had no doubt of the purpose for which she intended it.

"I must go and make all the inquiries possible," he said to Esther Grant, whose distress was pitiable to witness. "Meanwhile, hold your tongue concerning everything you have told me."

She readily promised, and on leaving the Court he drove at once to the home of the nurse who had formerly attended her, and who he was fortunate enough to find in.

"I want to ask you a few questions about what happened while you were at the Court," he said, too impatient for information to make any delay in coming to the object of his visit. "Can you tell me who visited your patient besides yourself?"

"Miss Lester and Lady de Roubalx," she answered at once.

"No one else?"

She shook her head.

"No, sir, not that I remember. Stay—yes! Lord Cliffe came in for five minutes one night."

"And what happened during his visit?"

The woman narrated the details pretty accurately, for they had made an impression on her. When she finished Dr. Fletcher said,—

"You are sure there was no paper with writing upon it inside the bag?"

"Quite sure, for I think that was what his lordship expected to find, and he seemed very disappointed. I noticed, sir," she continued, in a hesitating manner, as if not quite sure of how her information would be received, "that the flowers seemed rather fresher than might have been expected; in fact, if I had been asked to judge, I should have said they hadn't been picked more than a week, and Mrs. Grant had been lying there a good long time."

"Ah!" exclaimed the doctor. "Well, now about Lady de Roubalix's visits. Did you not think it strange she should take it into her head to spend so much time at a sick bed?"

"I thought it very strange, sir; but it was not my place to say so."

"Certainly not—certainly not. Did you ever see her ladyship trying to look at the bag?"

"No, sir."

"Nor anything strange in her behavior?"

The nurse considered a moment.

"I think not, sir; unless, indeed, it was the night I went to the village, and when I came back I met her just outside the room, and caught her smiling to herself, as if she was very pleased about something or other. That was the night Mrs. Grant had such a queer sleep, and I wondered if you had put a narcotic in her medicine."

"I never gave her one in my life. You say she had the appearance of having taken it?"

"Exactly, sir, and her sleep was so deep and sound that it put the idea in my head. I believe I made bold to mention it to Lord Cliffe."

"Then he came in the same night?"

"Yes; but after Lady de Roubalix left."

Dr. Fletcher had no more questions to ask, being quite satisfied that Lord Cliffe had nothing to do with the disappearance of the papers, and therefore took his departure, more low-spirited than he had been for some time, for he considered that Hubert's prospects of succeeding to his uncle's estates had now vanished.

Directly he got home he sought the young man, and told him all he had heard, for he thought it better he should know the truth at once.

"Then good-bye to my last chance!" exclaimed Hubert, trying to smile, and unconscious until this moment of how great his hopes had been. "At least, I have the moral satisfaction of knowing my parents were married, and that is a good deal."

"I don't know," said the doctor, ruefully; "it doesn't bring you any nearer the Cliffe barony than I can see. I am afraid there is no doubt your cousin stole the documents, but the evidence against her is purely circumstantial, so we should not make out a case to go to law about."

"No, most certainly we couldn't."

"And there can be no doubt that the papers were destroyed directly they came into her possession. She would be too cautious to keep them, you may be sure. I knew from the first moment I set eyes on her that she was no good; in fact, I said so."

But as this was a little formula the doctor repeated regarding the majority of his female acquaintance it was not to be taken much notice of, although it must be confessed that his prejudices against the countess had been more violent than even his prejudices usually were.

Hubert's position was indeed a hard one—harder than ever now that he knew beyond a doubt that he was his uncle's lawful heir.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CHRISTMAS had come ushered in by frost and snow—"a real old-fashioned Christmas," people said, as they brought in their logs of wood, and

piled them high on the hearth, while outside a keen wind, that cut you like sharp points of ice, was blowing about, and boys were shouting as they skated on the frozen surface of the lakes, apparently under the impression that noise would help to keep them warm.

Lady De Roubalix had decided at the last moment to spend Christmas Day in England. "Christmas on the Continent was not Christmas at all," she observed, as on the twenty-third she arrived with her maid, her courier, and her luggage, for she travelled with as much state as if she had been a royal personage, and wrapped herself in fables that the Empress of All the Russias would not have despised.

She was looking more beautiful than ever; but, in spite of this, it was impossible to be in her company long without noticing in her manner a certain restlessness that had not formerly been there, and which showed itself in a nervous movement of the hands and twitching of the lips. Directly she saw Mrs. Belton she inquired how Esther Grant was, and on being informed that she was much better, desired to see her.

When the woman came to her room she questioned her rather minutely concerning her former life; but Esther, who had received instructions from Dr. Fletcher, was very discreet in her answers, and declared that her memory of past events was even yet vague, and after a little while the Countess rather curtly dismissed her.

She dined alone in her boudoir, for the state of the great oak-panelled dining-room would have been dreadful in her solitude; and soon after she had finished she was astonished by the appearance of a visitor, none other than Dr. Fletcher, who, after some debating with himself, had come, in spite of Hubert's remonstrance.

"This is really very good of you," exclaimed the Countess, genuinely delighted to see some one, for she was heartily sick of the companionship afforded by her own thoughts, and though she did not like the physician he was better than no one at all. "You are my first caller."

"It is rather late to call, but I knew you did not arrive until towards evening."

"Never mind that. I am not a bit tired, but quite ready to hear all the gossip of the neighbourhood. Of course lots of things have happened since my departure."

"Well, not so very many. Cliffe is rather a quiet place, you know," observed the doctor, who had taken the seat she indicated, opposite her own, and was now intently studying her face.

"But quiet or not, somebody is always being born, or married, or dying."

"Lady Carlyon is dead."

The flush on her face deepened a very little.

"Yes, it was extremely sad, was it not? And her little boy, too. Poor Sir Ascot!"

"Your pity is rather wasted on him."

"Is it? How so?"

"He does not mourn for his wife."

"You are mistaken," she exclaimed, rather eagerly. "If you were to see him you would acknowledge it, for he looks wretchedly."

"Indeed! Then you have met him lately?"

"He called on me in Paris some week or so ago," she answered, colouring again, and playing with her rings, on whose starry radiance the firelight was flashing, and bringing out a thousand little prismatic sparkles.

"Well, to tell the truth, I didn't come for the pleasure of talking of Sir Ascot Carlyon and his domestic affairs, but of no less a personage than yourself," said the doctor, with an entire change of tone.

"Of me!" she echoed, startled, and looking up at him with wide-open eyes. "What—with a little, affected laugh—"can you possibly find interesting in such a subject?"

"Perhaps, under ordinary conditions, I might fall in doing so; but crime is often interesting, although it may be, at the same time, revolting."

"Crime!" she repeated. "Who dares accuse me of it?"

"I do!" he answered, rising, and standing before her, stern and unbending. "I accuse you,

Clarice Countess De Roubalix, of being a thief, and if you ask me what you have stolen I reply—the certificates of the marriage of your uncle, Alec Cliffe, with Margaret Sumner, and the baptism of their son Hubert!"

Every vestige of colour deserted her cheeks, leaving her as white as the marble mantel against which, as she got up, she leaned. Her eyes had the hunted look of a chased animal, and some of its fierceness; but her attitude, in that first moment of surprise pleaded "Gallity" to the accusation as plainly as if her lips had spoken the words.

"It is false!" she cried, when she regained enough self-control to speak, but her lips and hands both trembled, and she had much ado to stand without support. "I say it is false!"

"And I repeat, it is true—your own demeanour condemns you. Innocence does not look like you do."

She did not speak just at once—her thoughts were taking an agonised sweep backwards. Could the nurse have seen her, as she abstracted the papers from the bag, substituting the faded flowers in their place? No, it was impossible, for she had taken the precaution of locking the door, and Esther Grant herself had been wrapped in the profound slumber produced by the opiate she had administered.

Could—? She did not shape her second thoughts into words, but sank down into a chair, powerless, while her dilated eyes were fixed on the doctor's.

"Have you the certificates?" she breathed.

Dr. Fletcher was entirely taken aback by the question, which was the last he expected she would ask. He looked at her fixedly, to see if she really meant what she said, and came to the conclusion that she did.

"No, you are quite well aware that they are or were—in your own possession. If they are destroyed it is you who have destroyed them," he replied, taken off his guard.

A total change came over her; she rose to her feet, and faced him, the colour returning to her cheeks, the light to her eyes.

"So you have been trying to frighten me with a chimera, hatched from your own imagination!" she cried, laughing triumphantly. "Worse still, I was silly enough to be frightened by it. But you are mistaken if you think you are going to take advantage of my weakness to make terms with me on behalf of your protégé—the soi-disant Hubert Cliffe. I am not so silly as that, Dr. Fletcher. You will have the goodness to leave my house, and not to trouble me with any further visits in the future; otherwise I shall have to enforce my wishes in a manner that you might find disagreeable."

"Don't trouble yourself, madam," said the doctor, almost in too great a passion to speak plainly. "I will reserve my visits for honest women."

And with this Partisan shot he went, not altogether dissatisfied with the result of his visit, for he had proved, beyond a doubt, the Countess's guilt—at least to his own mind.

"Still, there is something about it that I don't understand," he muttered to himself, on his way home. "What did she mean by asking me if I had the documents? Is it possible they are still in existence? By Jove, I believe that is the case! I will apply for a search warrant, and have Cliffe Court searched from garret to basement, and see if I can't be even with you yet, my fine lady Countess!"

His visit, if it had no other effect, at least had the one of considerably disturbing Lady De Roubalix, who after his departure remained in her boudoir, crouching down close to the fire, her hands clasped across her knees, and her brooding eyes fixed gloomily on the leaping flames.

She had been brave enough to his face, when she uttered her defiance, because her nature was essentially bold and, in a measure, courageous; but for all that she knew that, just for a moment, she had dropped the mask, and he had seen her guilt painted on her countenance as clearly as if she had knelt at his feet and begged for mercy.

"How did he get to know of the existence of the papers?—who could have told him?" she



"I ACCUSE YOU, CLARICE COUNTESS DE ROUBAIX, OF BEING A THIEF!"

mused; but, puzzle as she might, she could find no answer to the question, for the notion of Esther Grant having revealed her secret did not suggest itself—the woman's quiet, vacant manner had been effectual in dulling to rest all suspicions concerning the recovery of her memory; and, to tell the truth, those suspicions had had a good deal to do with the Countess's return.

Presently she got up and went to the window, but dropped the curtains again with a slight shiver; for the night was wild and stormy, and the blasts that came sweeping through the leafless trees outside had a peculiarly mournful effect.

"How horribly lonely I feel!" she exclaimed, involuntarily speaking aloud. "I should die of ennui if I were here long alone. I wish—"

She did not continue her wish, but came to a thoughtful pause in front of the fire again, and remained for some time lost in musings that could hardly have found expression in words. Presently she resumed,—

"I am like one standing on the edge of a powder-mine, which may explode at any minute and ruin me; and the worst of it is, I have no means of securing my position. How shall I ever fathom the mystery of the disappearance of those papers?"

The more she thought of it the more perplexed she became; and, indeed, it was sufficiently bewildering to puzzle a stronger brain than hers.

One by one she recalled the incidents of that night when she had abstracted the certificates—how she had given Esther Grant the laudanum sent her by Dr. Fletcher instead of the invalid's proper mixture; how patiently she had waited until the opiate took effect, and then how astonished she had been when she found what the bag really contained.

That it held some secret of importance connected with Lord Cliffe she had always suspected, but she had no idea of how important it was; and her triumph may be imagined, for she saw at once how materially the possession of these cer-

tificates affected her own position. Without them Hubert could not claim the entailed estates, and Lord Cliffe having no power to dispose of them by will, they would of necessity descend to herself.

With hasty stitches she had sewed the little bag up again, the task proving difficult to her unaccustomed fingers; and then she had gone to her rooms, and debated what she should do with her newly-acquired treasure.

To destroy it at once would have been impudent, considering that it was possible she might marry Hubert, who, at that time, she was decidedly inclined to like; and, besides, the possession of the documents would always be a source of power in her hands; so the point was to find for them a place of safety, where there was no likelihood of their being discovered, and where they might remain until events had shaped themselves in such a manner as to prove a guide for her own future conduct.

This was a difficult matter, for she had lost the key of her desk, which was the unique repository for papers in her possession, so when she went to bed she placed them under the pillow, resolving to carry them about her person, until she finally decided where they should be hidden.

In the morning, when she looked for them, they were gone!

Yes, gone as though they had been carried off by some invisible agency during the night. She searched most carefully through the room, not leaving untouched a single article of furniture, but with a fruitless result; and what made the affair so much more mysterious was the fact that the bedroom door was locked on the inner side, and the windows were all fastened, so that the idea of any one having forced an entrance had to be abandoned. Besides, no one could have taken the papers from under her pillow without disturbing her, for she was far from being a heavy sleeper, and thus the matter was rendered totally inexplicable—nay, almost supernatural.

The Countess, who was rather credulous, was

inclined to regard it in this latter light, and to attribute her loss to some occult agency; nevertheless, she had spared no efforts to discover if the papers were still in the house, and this restless curiosity had attracted the notice both of Arline and Mrs. Belton.

Some little time later, Lord Cliffe, in the heat of his passion, had told her of Hubert's refusal to become her husband, and also that no proof of his parents' marriage had ever been forthcoming; but when she asked him, point blank, whether he believed any such marriage had taken place, he had been compelled to answer in the affirmative, for he said that Alex. Cliffe had declared with his dying breath that Hubert's mother had been his lawful wife, and added that it was only lately he had discovered the loss of the certificates, which he imagined must have been stolen.

And it was of these things Lady De Roubaix was thinking as she sat alone in her boudoir listening to the rain beating against the windows, and the wind howling round the chimneys of Cliffe Court.

(To be continued.)

Boer prisoners in our hands state that the reason our artillery-fire is ineffective against the Boer trenches is because they are formed in the shape of the letter S, which formation gives the occupants freer movement and greater protection than if they were constructed straight. The formation is said to be borrowed from an old Basuto method of fortification.

A NUMBER of important discoveries have been made at Valle Crucis Abbey, Llangollen, where excavations have been proceeding for some time, under the direction of the Rev. Trevor Owen. Whilst excavating along the south cloister, near the refectory, a Roman bath was disclosed, with the remains of hypocaust and Roman pottery. An ancient Celtic cross was also discovered, and a tombstone of the twelfth century.



THE STRANGER THOUGHT SHE LOOKED A PICTURE FIT TO CHARM AN ARTIST'S PENCIL

HER GREAT MISTAKE.

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CHAPTER III.

FLORENCE WARBURTON's first appearance among her kindred had certainly not been propitious, and, smarting from the insult offered her, she rushed upstairs to the shelter of her dreary attic, it seemed to the lonely girl that mercy had almost gone out of Heaven. 'Live here two years and a half!—here among people who treated her as something dependent on their charity! A creature they might slight and insult at pleasure! Every instinct of her heart rebelled against it.

"I will run away," thought the poor child, sadly. "If I can only get back to Connacht House Miss Frost will keep me, when she hears how I am treated here."

But alas! memory told her even that refuge would be closed against her; that very evening Miss Frost was to cross to Boulogne on her way to spend the vacation in Normandy.

Connacht House would be in the care of a young English governess much too timid and frightened to entertain a runaway, who was a fugitive, and might at any moment be called for by the hand of authority.

No! There was no home for her at Kensington; she must stay where she was, and bear the misery of her life. She cried until she could cry no longer—until no more tears would come; and then, weary with fatigue and excitement, she undressed and went to bed, little reckoning in her sadness that she had had no proper meal since the hurried lunch Miss Frost had ordered for her favourite some eight hours before.

When she awoke the summer sunshine was pouring into the room, and the maid who had first received her stood at her bedside with a little tray.

"I've brought you a cup of tea and a slice of bread-and-butter, miss!" said the girl, kindly. "I thought you'd be quite faint, for breakfast isn't till nine o'clock!"

Florence thanked her. She felt better for the refreshment so kindly offered; and, getting up, she began her toilet. She was more hopeful now than the night before. She remembered she had not seen her uncle and his daughters. Surely the eight members of the Foxgrove Court family would not all be so unendurable as Tony and his mother!

She found the breakfast-room easily; there was none there but a stout, elderly gentleman whose rubicund face and watery eyes left no doubt of his being Tony's father.

He advanced to Florence kindly enough, gave her a resounding kiss, and patted her head much as though she had been a puppy suddenly presented to his notice.

"And so you're poor Claude's daughter? You're kindly welcome, my dear! You must try and mind your aunt's fancies, and then I dare-say you'll get on pretty well."

Florence thanked him, but her voice shook.

"Nonsense!" said the little man, authoritatively. "You mustn't be so downhearted! Why, I declare the girl's crying! Where's Pussy?"

There entered as he spoke a girl who might have been Florence's own age, a bright laughing creature, who looked as if she had never known a care.

"What is it, dad?"

"Here's your cousin, Pussy, and she seems as if she'd do nothing but cry; just see to her a bit, and don't let your mother worry her."

"All right!" returned Pussy, equably; then taking Florence's hand she kissed her warmly. "It's no use minding what ma says. I never do!"

Enter the rest of the family. Bertha and Alice, two very grand young ladies; Maude and Kate, smart, over-dressed children; Mr. Tony and his mother.

Mrs. Fox ignored her niece's existence. Tony glanced at her as though he had by no means

forgiven her; but no one mentioned last night's occurrence, and breakfast was proceeded with.

Before she had been a week at the Court Florence understood the exact nature of its inmates. Mrs. Fox had married a rich man, and could never quite forgive herself or him that he was not a gentleman.

Her darling scheme was that her son Tony should go into Parliament, and marry a lady of title; and her daughters Alice and Bertha secure high-born husbands. Pussy she washed her hands of altogether. She was like her father, vulgar and outspoken; and would doubtless marry a shopkeeper. The children she could not think about, until their sisters were settled.

Poor Florence! To teach these children—to take the entire charge of them—to write notes for Mrs. Fox—to assist the maid with Alice and Bertha's toilets, these were but a small part of her duties! Her aunt kept her so busy that when she crept upstairs to her attic, mind and body were alike so worn out that she dropped asleep the moment her head touched the pillow.

There was no one to help her. Pussy was always kind and good-natured, but she had no influence with her mother, and Mr. Fox was a cipher in his own family. He had no power to prevent Florence from being turned into a genteel drudge.

She never dined with the family; the care of the children forbade that. She never spent the evening in the drawing-room; those pretty evenings with which Miss Frost had provided her might as well have been in the shop for the use they were.

She never uttered a complaint; only one afternoon when she saw Lady Emily Fane's carriage drive away, and knew her friend had been calling at the Court, her eyes filled with tears.

"Don't cry!" said Pussy, consolingly. "Lady Emily is awfully slow; she never talks about anything but her son, and as you've not seen him it couldn't interest you."

"But I have seen him!"

"Have you? What do you think of your future cousin?"

"My what!"

"Your future cousin! It's ma's darling shame that he should marry Alice. I haven't seen him myself since he returned from India; he used to be a handsome, careless boy; too lazy to get his own way, but awfully nice to talk to!"

Neither of the girl's suspected that Lady Emily's errand had been to invite Miss Warburton on a long visit to herself. Mrs. Fox expressed her gratitude, but declared the dear girl was too shy and timid to go anywhere. She was extremely obliged, but Florence would never consent to leave home.

"Nasty old thing!" commented Alice. "She might as well have asked me!"

"She is afraid, my dear. She does not want to lose her son, and she knows the dangers there would be to him in seeing much of you."

Alice blushed.

"Cecil Fans is very jolly. That five years in India improved him awfully."

"And now he wants to settle down. He is not very rich," musingly; "but he has fair means, and every chance of a title. You might do worse, Alice!"

The next day Florence received a holiday. The whole family were going to a picnic at some ruins a few miles distant, and Mrs. Fox at once decreed that her niece's deep mourning must prevent her from accompanying them.

Florence card little. A day's rest and solitude was far more precious to her than a share in her relative's festivities.

She watched the party start without a single pang of envy; and then, putting on her broad-brimmed hat and taking a package of sandwiches the servants had cut for her, she, too, set out, for there was a charming wood near Foxgrove, and the lonely girl had long wanted an opportunity to explore it.

It was a perfect day—one of those bright August mornings when the sky has almost an Italian blueness, and a gentle wind prevents the warm sunshine from being too oppressive.

Our heroine enjoyed herself thoroughly. She had now been three weeks at the Court, and this was the first breath of freedom.

She loved the country with a passionate warmth only felt by those who have spent most of their life in London. To Florence nothing could have been more beautiful than the grand old wood, with its splendid trees, whose tops seemed almost to touch the blue sky.

She ate her dinner on the trunk of a fallen oak, and then walked on. She had never been so far in the wood before. She had no idea where it led. She wandered on and on, finding new beauties at every step, until at last, fairly tired out, she threw herself upon the ground, and her head resting confidently upon a grand old forest tree, she fell asleep.

Her hat had fallen disregarded to her feet; her fair head had no covering but her golden hair. Sleep smoothed the lines of sorrow's writing from her face, and gave her pale cheek a bright pink flush. A smile parted her lips, as though her dreams were happy. She looked a picture fit to charm an artist's pencil.

And a man who stood and watched her thought so. His heart had long, he believed, been sealed against love. He fancied women false and heartless; called them the curse of a man's life. For full five years he had run the gauntlet of Belgravian drawing rooms, and never felt a wound. He believed himself impregnable, and yet, setting forth on a long solitary ramble, he came upon Florence asleep on the trunk of an old tree, and paused just because her face seemed to him the sweetest—the purest he had ever seen.

He did not speak to her. Not for worlds would he have interrupted her slumber. There was something in her face that told him she had seen sorrow—something that told him, for her forgetfulness was sweeter than reality. He stood and watched her in her round, dimpled loveliness, and as he watched a passionate longing—a deep regret filled his soul. For what he could not have told, unless for the fact that at thirty-five he

stood, as it were, alone—with no one in all the world to whom he was first and dearest.

But the bright blue sky had clouded over; big rain drops were falling; clearly a storm was coming. She must not be there, exposed to the elements, and so very gently he put one hand upon her shoulder to rouse her.

She woke at once, a half-smile flickering on her lips. It fled as reality came back to her, and she sat up with a half-sigh. She never spoke to her companion. She did not even see him.

He was not used to such neglect, and it piqued him just a little; but at that moment the big drops of rain turned to a pitiless, drenching shower, and he had an excuse for speaking to her.

"It is coming on to rain; I am afraid you will get wet."

She looked at the sky.

"I think it is only a shower. If I stand here well under the trees I shall not hurt."

A loud peal of thunder—a vivid flash of lightning seemed to belie her words.

"You must not stay there; it is full of danger. Don't you know trees attract the lightning?"

She looked at him simply.

"I must go home; but I am afraid I don't know the way. I took so many turnings I never thought of how I should get back."

Another growl of thunder—another flash of lightning—and his mind was made up.

"It is impossible that you can return home. There is a heavy storm coming on. Will you honour me by sheltering in my house? My housekeeper will do all in her power for your comfort."

She yielded. The rain was coming down in pitiless fury—already her thin dress was wet. Very gently the stranger wrapped a mackintosh, which he had been carrying, round her.

"We must make haste," he said, simply.

Florence followed him as quickly as she could; but her trembling steps did not keep pace with his, and seeing that, he paused—picked her up in his arms, without heeding her remonstrances, and bore her swiftly onwards until they came to a small stone gate leading to some private grounds. He entered these, and in another five minutes they stood before a picturesque, low-roofed, many-windowed house.

The servant who admitted them stared, as well she might. Her master, the cold, unsociable man, who loved nothing in the world but his own ease and pleasure, stood before her, his clothes wet through, the rain dripping from his hair, in his arms what looked like a bundle, but was in reality a young girl, whose hair had got unfastened from its coils and streamed in a golden glory over the Earl's shoulders.

"Ay, but, my lord, there's been an accident!" said the housekeeper in alarm.

"There has been no accident," returned Lord Eddale, quickly. "I have found this young lady out in the storm, and brought her here to take shelter. Attend to her yourself, Mrs. Kingswood; and do all you can to make her comfortable. Poor child!"—in unconscious pity—"I fear she has fainted!"

He surrendered Florence to the housekeeper and went to his own room.

There were very few servants at the Lodge. It was not his principal residence, little more than a shooting-box, which he kept up chiefly because it was near his favourite aunt, the Lady Emily Fane.

Alan Dane, Earl of Eddale, was a strikingly handsome man. His thirty-five years sat lightly on his brow; his deep, expressive blue eyes, his dark, curling hair and mobile features, looked just fitted to steal a woman's heart away, and yet the fact remained for full five years Lord Eddale had never sought to win a lady's smile.

Five years ago all had been different. Four lives, at least, stood between him and the earldom. He was only the younger son of an uncle of the reigning Lord Eddale. He had not chosen to eat the bread of idleness, and had a fairly good diplomatic post. He was on the road to affluence, if not to fortune; and being so, he had proposed to a girl whom he had loved for

months—who seemed the very creature to make him happy.

She accepted him. They were engaged. His family were delighted at his choice, and vied with each other in their attentions to the young fiancée. His uncle, Lord Eddale, in particular, invited her on a long visit to the Castle.

The wedding-day was fixed. Alan was in Constantinople, but in six weeks he would return to claim his bride. Those six weeks the girl had agreed to spend beneath his uncle's roof.

And then came the blow. Alan returned to find his love flown. She had preferred his cousin, Viscount Dane, heir-apparent to the earldom, to the man who loved her so well. It was a runaway match. His parents, ashamed of their son's perfidy, refused to see the Viscount or his wife; they only reappeared three months later, when their son was on his death-bed.

He died. His wife was left portiones—utterly dependent upon her husband's family. And now, when the successive deaths of uncle, father, and brother, had raised her first love to the family honours, the young Viscountess was spending her days in dreary attendance upon her widowed mother-in-law without so much as a hundred pounds a-year to call her own.

Alan never mentioned her name after they told him of the wedding. He threw up his diplomatic appointment at once, and started on a tour in the Far East. He only returned when he knew that the family title was unexpectedly his own. He fulfilled the duties of his position fairly well; was a generous landlord, a staunch friend, and an ornament to any drawing-room, only he never sought a lady's favour. Only it seemed he would never care again to look into a woman's eyes were she young or old, gentle or simple.

Lord Eddale was the most brilliant party in London, and yet manoeuvring mothers had well-nigh despaired of gaining him for their daughters. Some said he was still in love with his cousin's widow; others declared he would never forget her sufficiently to marry.

He was the last of an ancient title. He possessed a town house, an estate in Lancashire, and a pretty shooting-box in Kent; his income was over fifty thousand a year, and yet he outraged society's feelings by refusing to marry.

He changed his wet clothes quickly, passed a brush through his thick, curly hair, and descended to the drawing-room.

For some time his solitude was uninterrupted; then he rang the bell. Mrs. Kingswood herself answered the summons.

"The young lady is better, my lord. I am having her things dried, and I thought perhaps, as she has some distance to go, you would kindly let the brougham be ordered. She is not fit to walk poor, pretty young creature!"

"I should like to see her."

Mrs. Kingswood stared.

"She is in my room, my lord. I was just ordering them to bring her up some tea."

"Order tea for two, Mrs. Kingswood," said the Earl, simply. "I should like some also."

Much astonished she went to do his bidding, and Lord Eddale rising, walked off towards the pretty, cosy sitting-room which had been appropriated to the old housekeeper.

Although it was summertime a fire burnt brightly in the grate, shedding a ruddy glow over the quaint room and its homely furniture, the old-fashioned pictures on the walls, the queer-looking china ornaments.

It was a pleasant picture, and Lord Eddale thought so as he closed the door and advanced softly towards the sofa.

It was of old crimson rep, and on it reclined a little figure dressed in loose white draperies.

She started up as she saw him, and put out one small hand with the grace of an empress.

"Mrs. Kingswood says you have saved my life," said Florence, simply. "I am very much obliged to you, only—don't think me ungrateful—I do so wish you hadn't."

She looked as if she had stepped out of an old picture.

Her own garments were being dried, but Mrs. Kingswood had generously placed her whole wardrobe at the stranger's disposal.

Declining the rigid Sunday silk, Florence had chosen a loose wrapper of old-fashioned chintz—white ground, with blue forget-me-nots running about it. It was, of course, much too big, but the girl had fastened it at the waist with a blue ribbon, and bands of the same confined the large sleeves above the elbow, so that they turned back to show the white, dimpled arms. The golden hair—evidently unplaited that it might dry the sooner—hung in a waving cloud around her.

She might have been a princess from her unconscious dignity; but there was a pathos in her sweet voice, yearning sorrow in her brown eyes, which told Alan she was a wandering little child with no one very near her, no one to be very anxious as to her fate.

"You must not talk like that," he said, brusquely, almost roughly. "I don't suppose I have saved your life, but I may have spared you rheumatic fever. What can your friends be thinking of to let you go roaming about by yourself?"

"I don't think I have any friends, at least, not here"—with a bright smile—"I have a great many in London."

Alan hated London immediately, with a fierce, unreasoning hatred.

"Then why didn't you stay in London?" he demanded, authoritatively.

"I couldn't," said the girl, with a pitiful quiver of her lips. "Papa died, you know; and I was grown up. I couldn't stay at school any longer," they said."

Alan relented.

"Then your friends are the school-girls?"

"Yes; they all loved me. I was so happy there."

"And aren't you happy here?"

She shook her head, and the big tears trembled on her dark lashes.

"I shall never be happy again."

"Don't," cried Alan, angrily; "you mustn't talk like that—it isn't natural. A child like you ought not to say such things."

The fire had burnt up briskly, and its flames illuminated the room with a bright, ruddy glow. Florence looked at it with a smile.

"How pretty it is! I like this room so much. Is it the drawing-room, Lord Eisdale?"

The Earl laughed—he really could not help it.

"When you have had some tea, and feel rested, I will show you the drawing-room, I think this parlor a great deal pleasanter."

"Ah, but I must not stay," she said, wistfully. "It is getting late, and they will be expecting me."

"You must stay until you are rested. Who will be expecting you?"

"My aunt. She has gone to a picnic, but she will be home early."

"Oh, I know, the picnic to the Abbey ruins. No one will be back from that before eight or nine. They wanted me to go."

"Why didn't you?"

"I was not in the mood. Why didn't you?"

"I wasn't asked."

Mrs. Kingswood came in then with a tray piled with dainty china and silver. With her own hands she spread the meal, deeply honoured at the Earl's condescension.

"Oh, let me pour out tea!" cried Florence. "Do you know I have so often wanted to."

"Do you mean you never have?"

"No, never; but I will take great pains."

They were seated at the table then, opposite each other. The rare old chintz and the handsome silver looked inviting; but Alan, Earl of Eisdale, saw but one thing—the slight, girlish figure behind the silver tea-tray.

"And why did you never pour out tea before?" he asked, when Mrs. Kingswood had left them.

"You see, I have been at school for fifteen years, and—"

"Fifteen years!" exclaimed Alan, interrupting her; "but surely you went home for the holidays!"

"I never had a home. Papa was in India. He promised I should go out to him this winter."

The rebellious tears again gathered in her eyes.

"I understand," said Alan, gently; "poor child!"

"I like you to call me that," said Florence, gratefully. "They don't understand here how I loved him. They think because he was in India and I in England I cannot mind."

"Who doesn't understand?"

"My aunt Janet and the girls."

He looked puzzled.

"I don't know many people about here. What is your aunt's name?"

"Fox—she lives at the Court."

"Ah, I understand now. You are the Miss Warburton the Fanes were telling me about. Lady Emily is very disappointed you won't go and stay with her."

"She never asked me."

Alan smiled.

"I'm afraid Mrs. Fox has something to answer for. I know Lady Emily carried the invitation in person."

"Ah, it was the day I saw her through the window. I did so wish she would turn her head and see me."

"But surely, Miss Warburton, you don't have to see your friends through windows!"

She blushed.

"I am generally in the schoolroom."

"But after being at school fifteen years surely that is not necessary?"

"I have to teach the children, and then afterwards there are the girls' dresses to help with. I never seem to have any time until to-day. They gave me a holiday to-day—and the brown eyes sparkled—"I did enjoy it so!"

Lord Eisdale felt furious. He would have liked to suffocate Mrs. Fox and her whole family. For fully five minutes he did not speak.

"Don't think me lazy," said Florence, wistfully. "I know I ought not to have said that."

"I think you lazy! I blame you! Why, I was wondering how anyone could trouble you."

They had finished tea, and, ringing the bell, Lord Eisdale ordered the brougham for seven o'clock. Then he took his little, shy, trembling guest through the drawing-room and library.

Florence agreed with him in preferring Mrs. Kingswood's cheerful apartment.

"And do you live here all alone, Lord Eisdale?"

"I don't live anywhere. I am a sad rover, Miss Warburton—here to-day and gone to-morrow."

"I wish you lived here," she said, simply. "Then, perhaps, I should see you sometimes. You have been so kind to me."

Alan made her no answer, but he did what he had not done to any woman for five years—he took the little white hand in his and pressed it to his lips.

"We are friends," he said, gravely; "remember that, Miss Warburton, while I live I have no greater pleasure than to serve you."

He delivered her to Mrs. Kingswood. When she came down in her plain black dress, his princess seemed transposed into a timid school-girl; the brougham was waiting, and the old housekeeper took her place at Florence's side.

"Shall we drive right up to the house?" asked Florence, nervously.

"Not if you would rather not, dear."

"I am so frightened," said the girl, wistfully; "if my aunt saw me getting out of his carriage she might think I had asked Lord Eisdale to lend it to me."

Mrs. Kingswood saw the force of this; the carriage was stopped ten minutes' walk from the Court, and she walked behind the young lady to the house. One glance at the windows told them the family had not returned, for there were no lights visible in the dining-room.

"Good-bye," said Florence, warmly. "I shall never forget how good you have been to me."

Lord Eisdale thought a great deal of the sleeping beauty he had discovered in the wood—in fact, he thought of very little else—and the result of his meditations was that very early the next afternoon he walked through the wood, and called at Foxgrove Court.

He was ushered into the drawing-room, and received by its mistress and her daughter with an empressment which knew no bounds.

Alan was far too much a man of the world to allow the motive of his visit to be guessed. He never commented upon the absence of the little creature he had come to see. He told Mrs. Fox, as her nearest neighbour, her felt they should not be strangers, and then accepted a very eagerly worded invitation to dine with them one evening in the following week.

Alan Dane took care that the evening should be of his choosing, and fixed on one when he knew a large harvest-home in the neighbourhood would deprive Miss Warburton of her pupils. Then he wilfully mistook the hour of dinner, and arrived at half-past six instead of half-past seven, and found the ladies of the family all engaged in their toilet.

His apologies were courteous. He declared he would stroll in the grounds until his hostesses were at liberty; and then he walked slowly round the house until, through an open window, he espied the face which so haunted his fancy.

A little paler, a little graver than she had been the week before, but very sweet and lovely.

"Miss Warburton!"

A crimson flush dyed the girl's cheek.

"Oh, please go away," she cried, in a frightened voice. "Aunt Janet would be so angry."

"Why?"

"Because I have all this work to do," and she held up a skirt half trimmed with lace. "Bertha is to wear this to-night."

"Put your work down," he said, taking it from her trembling fingers. "Now answer me one question. You know you told me you would be my friend. When shall I see you again?"

"I don't know."

"I am waiting for your answer," said Alan, in a tone of fond authority. "I do not mean to go from here until you give it me."

Florence hesitated.

"I expect I might visit here three times a week and be no nearer you," said the Earl, wrathfully.

"Yes; I never see strangers."

"Do you never go out?"

"Oh, yes, with the children."

"But without them?"

"Never, except on Sundays. They are with their father in the afternoon; and I generally go to church."

Alan smiled, and disappeared.

Mrs. Fox's hopes ran high that night. Here was the wealthiest earl in England, the nobleman who was a reputed woman-hater, almost a self-invited guest.

Lord Eisdale's courtesy was perfect. He made himself the life and soul of the party. He took his hostess in to dinner in right of his rank; only later on, when he had to make choice among the young ladies, he singled out Pussy for his companion.

Mrs. Fox stared, and her elder daughter marveled. They had not the key to the enigma. They did not know Lord Eisdale was thinking of a sweet voice, which told him "Pussy is always kind."

It was a lovely summer's night, and they all went into the grounds. Pussy chattered on as freely to the Earl as if he had been a nobody. A thorough democrat was this young lady. She told him quite frankly about her cousin.

"Mamma says Florence must not come out while she is in such deep mourning; but that's not why she is kept shut up."

"Way not, then?"

"She is very pretty, and mamma is afraid your cousin will fall in love with her."

"What, Cecil?"

"Yes, he was in the same regiment as her father, and they travelled down from London together."

Lord Eisdale sought out his cousin the next morning, and gave him a very warm invitation to shoot over his estate, and take as many friends with him as he liked. Cecil accepted, rapturously wondering not a little at the Earl's sudden hospitality.

"I shall stay here awhile," said Alan, non-

chalance; "and I'll see your mother is not dull."

The moment Cecil was gone Lady Emily drove over to Foxgrove and renewed her invitation to Miss Warburton. It was accepted with pleasure this time, since Cecil was away and Alice's prospects could, therefore, not be endangered. It was highly desirable to get rid of Florence for a while, since Tony had been discovered paying her stolen attentions; and Mrs. Fox believed so fully in her son's fascination, she could not realize any girl being proof against it.

"I am so glad to have you," said Lady Emily, as they drove home together. "Do you know, Miss Warburton, I have always wished for a daughter; it will be quite a pleasure to me to fancy for a little while my wish is realized."

And the second evening of Florence's stay at Westfield arrived the Earl of Elsdale.

"I promised Cecil to take care of you in his absence, Aunt Emily, and here I am."

"My dear, I am always glad to see you. Let me introduce you to Miss Warburton."

But he took Florence's slim fingers into his.

"Miss Warburton and I have met before."

Lady Emily never doubted it was at the Court. She was called away to see someone on business, and the two were left alone.

"You did not go to church on Sunday afternoon," said Alan slowly.

"No, I was too tired!"

"I waited for you two hours!"

"You waited for me! I am very sorry! I mean it was very kind of you to take the trouble!"

"It was no trouble."

"Is it not kind of Lady Emily to ask me here?"

"Kind, to herself."

Florence smiled.

"It seems too good to be true. I am so happy, I have forgotten all my troubles."

"Poor child!" he had taken the slim fingers again into his. "What makes you so happy?"

"Your aunt is kind to me."

"I should like to be kind to you, Florence."

"How did you know my name?"

"I heard it at the Court. It just suits you."

"Aunt Janet says it is too fanciful. It was mamma's wish, I think."

Lord Elsdale came to Westfield nearly every day. He was always full of some scheme for his aunt's pleasure, and Lady Emily, who loved him dearly, never suspected his real object in coming. She had a little dream of her own, poor lady; it had long been her wish that Cecil should marry, and where would he find another wife so sweet and winsome as Florence Warburton? Already she loved the lonely girl as her own child—already she dreamed of the time when she would be Mrs. Fane.

Lord Elsdale never said a word of his wishes, he never spoke to Florence a syllable the whole world might not have heard, only he made it the business of his life to see that she was happy—only his blue eyes brightened, his deep voice softened for her as for no other living creature.

"What do you think of Alan?" Lady Emily asked her little visitor one evening when they sat alone.

"He is very handsome!"

It was not in the least what she had meant to say, but somehow no other words would come.

"Yes!" returned the aunt, warmly; "and he is so generous and true. I wish he would settle down and be like other people."

"I don't think the Earl is eccentric."

"You don't understand, Foy. I mean I want him to marry; he is the last of his line; when he dies the title will be extinct."

Florence Warburton was silent; she loved her hostess dearly, but not even to please her could she express a hope that Lord Elsdale should marry. Marry! Why the very thought told her her own secret; those dark blue eyes had charmed her heart out of her own keeping. She, the lonely orphan, the little unformed schoolgirl, had been mad enough to love the most noble the Earl of Elsdale. Nothing but misery could come of it—nothing but certain woe. He was so great and generous, he would never stoop to think of her; and she—well, she loved him

as men are not always loved, and as women have it in them to love but once.

"No, Alan will never marry," repeated Lady Emily, as though stating a well-known fact. "I suppose it would be more than we could expect that he should."

"Why!" asked Florence, a little defiantly.

"My dear, he was engaged to the most beautiful creature the sun ever shone upon—he loved her with all his heart and soul—their wedding day was fixed—"

"Don't say she died," came from Florence, with a pitiful sob. "Oh! Lady Emily, how could she die when anyone loved her so!"

"She did not die. I am afraid she did not care much for love; she gave herself and her beauty to another—richer, nobler suitor."

"And Lord Elsdale?"

"Her loss wrecked his life; he has never been quite the same since. Alan will never get over his disappointment; it has made him a terrible roamer. With three establishments of his own in England, he is generally wandering half the year on the Continent. I expect he will soon be off again; in fact, he said as much last night."

Lady Emily was called away; she could not tell the agony she had inflicted. Left alone, Florence flung herself on her knees, and, with her head buried in the sofa pillows, wept such silent, voiceless tears, as only come from real misery. She had wept for her father's loss, for her own hardness, but never with the mute despair she felt now, at eighteen, her every hope of happiness centred on Alan. And lo! he was going to leave her—his whole heart was another's!

Someone coming softly in witnessed her grief. Lord Elsdale's heart ached as he saw her. He had come there that night resolved to risk everything and know his fate. He thought he had taught Florence what happiness was—had given her an earnest of what her life should be if she would only trust it to him; and now he found her weeping as children cannot weep, grieving as women only have the power to grieve.

Florence!"

No answer. Very gently Alan stepped forward and raised her to her feet.

"Florence, what is it? Speak to me. Who has dared to make you shed such tears?"

"No one,"—she was sobbing still, and her voice was faint and broken, but she never thought of disobeying him—"no one, indeed, Lord Elsdale, it is only that I am tired and foolish."

Lord Elsdale put her on the sofa, and standing in front of her, fixed his blue eyes full upon her face.

"You called me your friend," he said, steadily; "I am waiting to hear how I can help you."

"You can do nothing. Indeed—indeed, you cannot."

He looked at her gravely.

"I left you yesterday a happy, careless child."

"I shall never be a child again," she said, sadly. "Oh! Lord Elsdale, I wish you had left me that afternoon in the wood."

"I wish nothing of the sort. I mean to make you happy. Do you know what I came here for this evening?"

"Yes."

The answer amazed him.

"And did that make you cry? Oh! my child, surely you know I would not do it if it made you unhappy?"

"You came to say good-bye," said Florence, steadily; "Lady Emily has just told me; she says you will never have a home or be settled happily again, because—"

She stopped. Alan knew quite well she had been listening to his own story from his aunt's lips.

"Florence," he said, gravely; "you are too good and pure to deceive me. Tell me why you were crying!"

"I can't," said the girl, sharply. "Oh! go away; don't ask me cruel questions."

"I must ask you one more, my darling—

were you crying because you thought I was going away—were those precious tears for me?"

She answered nothing; she hid her golden head in unutterable confusion.

"Florence, I may tell you now the true purpose of my coming here to-night. It was not to bid you farewell; it was to ask you if there need be any good-bye between you and me, my darling. I love you as my own soul; I will do what life can to make you happy. The only privilege I crave of Heaven is that of sheltering your golden head from all storms, if only you will trust me and be my wife."

"Your wife!" murmured the girl, in surprise; "your wife?"

"My much-loved wife—my dearest treasure! Florence, lift your clear eyes to mine and tell me if my dream is all in vain, if my love is entirely hopeless!"

(To be continued.)

THE MARCHESA'S REVENGE.

(Continued from page 416.)

But she failed to understand my meaning, looking only frightened, as though she feared some fresh trouble was in store for her.

"Birdie, don't look like that, my darling!" I said, drawing her towards me. "It was a woman, dear, who was knocked down, and that woman was his wife!"

At first she could scarcely realize what I told her; and then, as the truth dawned upon her, a tumult of feelings surged through her brain. And could she be blamed if in that one moment a hope, a prayer even to Heaven passed her lips, that she might be removed from between her and her life's happiness?

I had informed the landlord of the name and rank of the unconscious burden, which they had, at my request, brought into the house; but when they told me a short while after that the doctor had pronounced life to be extinct, a cold shudder passed through my frame.

Birdie had relived at my request. She looked so worn and weary, and the death of the Marchesa was as yet unknown to her, but it was then that I telephoned to Antonio. "Come at once," I wired. "Clifford's Hotel, Strand. G. Macfarlane," and then I sat down to await his arrival. I had once ventured to the room where the dead lay, but I soon replaced the sheet which covered the features, looking younger and less drawn in death than when I last viewed them in life, and as I moved from the spot I thanked Heaven for its goodness.

But it was in the early hours of a new day that Antonio arrived. His face was pinched and worn, and he trembled visibly when he was shown to my room.

"Birdie!" he questioned. "Oh! Gertie, don't keep me in suspense. The worst is easier to bear than this dreadful doubt."

Of her—only of her, I thought, and his wife lying cold and dead beneath the same roof!

"No—no, Antonio. Birdie is not ill, only tired, poor child, and like a weary babe sleeping peacefully; but your wife, the Marchesa, is here."

"Here!" he exclaimed, and I could see the veins rise on his forehead like cords under the influence of his passion.

I placed my hand on his arm then.

"Be calm, Antonio," I said. "She will never come between you and your happiness again. She is dead!"

"Dead!" he ejaculated. "Dead!" and then he sank down on a chair by the table where he was standing, burying his face in his hands, while the tears he could not restrain wept through his fingers.

But I knew it was not the outpouring of his grief which thus shook his frame. No, it was not for the lifeless woman that he thus wept, but for the gentle girl, over whose future a dark, deep shadow had fallen through him.

I led him then to the chamber of death—all so still—and he looked for one moment on the dead face, and then he turned, whilst something like a shudder passed through his frame.

We closed the door gently behind us then, and, in answer to his mute appeal, I bid him follow me to where our darling was sleeping in an adjoining apartment; her fair head with its wealth of golden tresses resting on a snow-white pillow, her long, curled lashes still wet with the tears she had shed ere sleep had closed her eyes.

How long he stood there gazing on the lovely face! And then he stooped to impress a kiss on her forehead, but she merely turned like a restless child, the while her rose-bud lips unclosed, and in her sleep she muttered "Antonio," and then I bade him leave her to her rest.

I was fatigued too. It had been an eventful day for all, and I was glad to seek the repose I so much needed; but my rest was fitful and disturbed, and I was almost glad when I again woke to the busy sounds of a London day.

Antonio left in the afternoon, nor did he come again until four days after, when the remains of the Marchesa had been placed in their last narrow bed.

"Spare no expense, Gertie!" he had said to me. "I will pay all, but do not ask me to be present at the funeral. I could not bear that; it would be such a mockery;" and so we, Birdie and I, made all the necessary arrangements, beautiful flowers from Covent Garden covering the coffin with its oaken lid, on which was engraved,—

"Bella Marchesa di Pallezzl, died September 30, 1887, aged 52," and then the cold earth fell over all.

CONCLUSION.

There is little more to tell, for long years have passed since that autumn day on which Birdie and I were sole mourners over the dead woman's grave. I believe something crept out, notwithstanding the pains we took that all should be kept quiet, for quite a crowd had assembled round the door when they brought the coffin out, and no one spoke of the dead as a less personage than a princess; but whatever her faults might have been they are forgotten now, and even Antonio does not fail to see that the stranger's grave in the English burial-ground, over which beautiful flowers bloom in their season, is still tended with care.

Birdie was married a short time after, Ella and Mabel, in total ignorance of former events, even forgiving her the sin she committed of coming into the world when she was not required, when they ascertained the fact that she had allied herself to a noble Italian family, in their descendant consenting to be amongst the wedding guests.

I suppose I shall remain with them still until the leveler of all closes my eyes, for neither Antonio nor his wife will hear of my leaving; and the little ones, for there are three now, rear out their disapproval if ever I threaten to go away from them all, who still regard me in the light of Little Mother!

[THE END.]

THE X-rays, besides being used as a detective for living smugglers, are coming into play as a mummy illuminator, and will prevent the Arabs from palming off plebeian clay as the genuine. If not only, daughter of the Pharaohs, even the amulets on the breast being plainly visible.

ONE of the most curious results of the annexation of Porto Rico will be an alteration in the shape of the island as it is known to the world. The Coast Survey is now at work finding out what the real shape of Porto Rico is, and it has already learned enough to show that the old Spanish surveys are not only worthless, but that they give a positively false impression of the formation of the coast.

THE HEIRESS OF BEAUESERT.

—IO.—

CHAPTER VIII.

"SAVE ME!"

"SAVE me! save me! save me!"

The young voice rang all down the corridor in shrillest accents of terror, and each word seemed to drive a knife through Rex Verreker's heart.

If the delusion could only be conquered there might be some hope for her life, but unless something could be done to calm her excited brain the doctors had little or no hope. His own bedroom was in the west wing of the castle, but it was so far removed from Lady Valerie's suite of rooms that he felt as if anything might happen without his knowing it till long after, so he spent but a short time in it.

Most of the night he passed pacing noiselessly up and down the corridor outside her door, unable to tear himself away. He felt that nothing he could do in her service was too much, for if he had never left her on that fatal quest for a glass of water Colonel Darrell would never have been able to lure her into the garden, and all this misery would have been spared—reasoning, in his mad regret, as if chance, and not Providence, ruled the course of our lives.

The Earl had been banished, sorely against his will, from his daughter's room, for his presence seemed to increase her excitement, but he came constantly to inquire at her door, and got little rest either day or night.

He looked so ill that Verreker was afraid he would break down, and at last prevailed on him to go to bed, on the promise that he would remain on guard meanwhile, and call him directly if he were wanted.

A horse was kept ready saddled in the stables, and a groom was sitting up somewhere downstairs, so that the doctor might be sent for at any hour without delay.

Miss Beck and one nurse were in Lady Valerie's room; the other had gone to take her much-needed rest, and the whole house, except for that incessant, unwearying voice, which rose and fell in shrill monotony, was still as death. Even the large clock in the hall had been stopped lest in striking the hours a fitful slumber might have been broken.

It was a week from the night of the ball, and to Rex Verreker it seemed as if a year at least had passed since the moment when his host's only daughter had come forward to greet him, and appeared to him the embodiment of everything that was lovely on earth.

In an instant Flossie Springfield had lost her charm, and he felt it in him to do or dare anything to win such a prize for himself—only it was out of reach. Alas, when we long for the fruit on the topmost bough (for nothing else is likely to content us)! Some men are able to make a ladder out of their wishes, and so win to the highest heights, whilst others fall and fall; but Verreker, though he had pluck enough for half a dozen, had a noble disregard for his own merits, and was apt to fancy himself not worthy of that highest place.

Perhaps it was pride and not humility which made him forbear to put himself forward, but nature had taken care to give him a charm which few could withstand, and an aristocratic appearance and lofty stature which made him conspicuous in any assembly.

He certainly looked fit to be the husband of an Earl's daughter as he leaned against the wall in anxious thought, listening with a frown of pain to the oft-repeated cry which told him that Darrell was still haunting Valerie's fevered dreams.

"If I could only break the spell!" he groaned, and the next moment started violently, for the nurse had come quite close to him without his noticing her.

She smiled, and said, in a low voice,—

"I am only going downstairs to fetch some more ice; the rest is all melted."

"Any change?" he asked, eagerly.

"Not any, sir. She can't get a moment's rest

for this idea that she has got into her head that somebody is always calling her. It will be the death of her if it goes on much longer," she added, mournfully.

He shrugged his shoulders despairingly, and the nurse went on down the passage, and disappeared round the corner out of sight.

Suddenly the cry from the sick-room ceased, and there was a hush so deep and so unbroken that he could hear distinctly the ticking of his own watch in his waistcoat-pocket.

A feeling of nervous dread came over him, such as he had never known before. It was as if Death had already come on stealthy wings, and hope was dead.

His heart stopped still, the blood rushed to his face. Could it be that all was over, and there was nothing left to pray for? He went towards the door of the sick-room, drawn by an irresistible impulse, feeling sure that if the last had really come Miss Beck would throw it open with a scared face.

Even as he looked at it it did open, and a white figure emerged into the corridor—a white figure with a crest of close-cropped curly hair, and wild, despairing eyes.

It hovered for a moment on the threshold, and then came swiftly towards him with bare feet which scarcely seemed to touch the floor.

Spell-bound he stood still, scarcely believing the evidence of his own senses, almost ready to fancy, in sickly dread, that it was Lady Valerie's spirit come to warn him that he would see her no more.

He watched with distended eyes and parted lips, his heart thundering in his ears; and then, as the light figure tottered and reeled against the wall he knew that it was no vision, but Valerie herself, and springing forward, was just in time to save her from falling head foremost on the carpet.

Oh! to feel that small brown head resting on his throbbing heart sent the blood couring wildly through his veins; but fear—the ghastly fear of what might follow—cast a chill over his ecstasy, as he raised her gently in his arms, and saw that her eyes were closed, and even her lips were white.

Oh, Heaven! she must not die!—not yet—not now, in the flower of her youth, when love was striving so hard to hold her back! Heaven could not be so unjust, so cruel, when man would have more compassion. He held her close against his chest, and felt the quivering in every limb as he carried her down the corridor to the shelter of her own room.

He pushed the door wide open with his foot, and saw, by the dim flicker of a night-light, Miss Beck, with a wonderful erection on her head, fallen fast asleep in an armchair. The poor old lady was quite exhausted, and sleep had evidently come over her against her will.

Now she started up, on seeing a young man stooping over the bed; but when Verreker, in a hurried whisper, explained what had passed, she was ready to sink into the ground in penitence for her own negligence.

Valerie lay back on the pillow, deathly pale, the only sign of life that constant quivering of every limb. Miss Beck, unable to restrain herself, wrung her hands, and sobbed aloud,—

"She's dying—she's dying, and it is I who have killed her!"

"Hush!" said Verreker, sternly. "Some brandy, quick!"

"Brandy!" in astonishment.

"Yes, it is the only hope—she's sinking!"

Miss Beck poured some spirit into a glass with a trembling hand and gave it to him. He held it to Valerie's lips, knowing it was the only thing that could bring her back to life, and thankful to think she was allowed to have it from his hand.

"Now send for the doctor, and call her father."

Miss Beck obediently rang the bell twice, which was the signal agreed on for the man downstairs, and then, catching up a shawl—for even at such a moment the old maid could not forget that she was somewhat en déshabillé—ran tremblingly down the passage, afraid of leaving her precious charge for a moment.

The Earl, whose anxious ears had caught the

sound of the bell, was standing at the door of his dressing-room, with a loose wrapper hastily thrown round him.

"What is it? Is she worse?"

"Yes," sobbing hysterically, "and it is all my fault!"

Lord Beaudesert laid his hand kindly on her shoulder, as if to assure her that he could not believe it, and hurried on with stern, set face, whilst Miss Beck followed, wringing her hands.

"My child! my only child!" — the words kept ringing through his brain. "Would to Heaven I could die for thee—my child—my child!"

He forgot to be surprised to see Verreker in the room; for he had but space for the one thought—could she be saved? His heart turned to stone, as he saw the white face, resting in utter helplessness on the embroidered pillow. His lip trembled, as he bowed his head in agonized prayer, then laid his hand gently on the soft, white brow. Instantly she moved her head uneasily, and a murmur came from her lips.

"What did she say?" appealing in a husky whisper to Verreker.

"I am coming!"

The Earl frowned.

"The old delusion—can nothing be done to cure it?" he asked, hopelessly.

The nurse looked at one another, and shook their heads; Miss Beck gave a deep, despairing sigh, whilst Verreker, with a look of sudden resolution, went softly from the room.

The morning light, grey and ghostly, was stealing through the chinks of every shattered window as he made his way through corridor and gallery to the west wing, where male guests were generally quartered when staying at Beaudesert.

Lord Marshall was enjoying the calm, unbroken repose of a selfish, placid nature, when Verreker took him by the shoulder, and shook him ruthlessly out of his pleasant slumbers.

"What on earth is the matter?" rubbing his eyes. "I was having such a jolly dream."

"Lady Valerie is worse," said Verreker, almost fiercely.

"Ah! I'm very sorry. She was as bad as she could be when I turned in," with a prolonged yawn, which said as plainly as possible, "you needn't have woken me up to tell me so." "I suppose there's nothing to be done," he added aloud. "There are plenty of grooms to fetch the doctor."

"There is something to be done, and I want you to do it," said Verreker quickly. "This delusion about Darrell it—is killing her," his voice growing hoarse. "It dragged her out of bed just now, and she can't get any rest for thinking that he's calling her. We can't have her unless it can be conquered."

"Awfully sorry, but I know nothing about mesmerism and that sort of thing, so it's no good appealing to me," looking as if he were on the point of turning over, with sleepy eyes ready to close the moment they were allowed to.

"You are the only man who can help us," said Rex, impatiently, his own vivid interest making no allowance for the other's seeming callousness. "You know where Darrell is. Get him to leave England at once. It is our only chance!"

"Deuced easy, if he's inclined to stop!" indulging in a stretch.

"But, if I'm not mistaken, you have a hold on him."

"I never said so; but if I had, Darrell's not the sort of man to funk."

"I know you can make him if you will."

"I'm not so sure as you are, but I'll see what I can do after breakfast," resettling his pillow as a hint that he had not yet finished his night's rest.

"If it is to do any good you must go at once," said Verreker, relentlessly, chafing at every moment of delay.

"The devil!" ejaculated Lord Marshall, dolorously.

"Whilst you get into your things I'll order your horse."

"You are very good," with a certain acidity of manner.

"Good heavens! do you object to getting up two or three hours earlier than usual when it is to save a girl's life!" exclaimed Rex, vehemently.

"Not at all. I—I enjoy it. I'm awfully glad to do it," in a hurry. "Just ring the bell for my man. I say"—calling after him as he was going out of the room—"don't you think you had better come too?"

It was dreadful for Rex to leave the house at that moment; but, after all, he could not expect to be admitted a second time to the sick room, and if the Viscount wished for him he was bound to go.

"If you want me," he said slowly.

"I think it would be well," said Marshall, brightening. "Darrell might cut up rusty, you know, and he's not a fellow to be trifled with! You needn't show, but I should like to know that you were at hand."

CHAPTER IX.

RENUENCED!

The doctor had already arrived before the two young men left the house; and Verreker, hurrying along the corridor for a last report, met him coming out of the sick room with the Earl of Beaudesert.

"We might save her yet," said Dr. Merton, "if she could get any rest; but she cannot sleep whilst this delusion lasts, and I am afraid she has not the strength to conquer it."

"If it were that she wanted anyone," said the Earl, sadly, "I would send for him, no matter who it was."

"It is not that. She fancies that someone is always calling her, and she must go to him. The only person she calls for or seems to wish to see," lowering his voice, "has a peculiar name—short, and ending in x."

"Ah, that's Verreker, the man who has just left us. There is no attachment between them—notting of the sort; but he's a nice young fellow, who would do anything for people in trouble."

"I know a good many people who would not grudge any amount of trouble for your daughter," said the doctor, with half a smile.

"Do you think we had better telegraph for Drew?"

"Yes; I should like him to be here, though I am not at all sure that he can do any good. The issue lies in other hands than ours."

"It seems to me strange that no narcotic can be found to take any effect."

"In this case, opium, morphine, and all the rest are powerless, for the delusion is stronger than the medicine. It seems to me that there is something behind the scenes," fixing his eyes on the Earl's troubled countenance. "I don't wish to force your confidence, but I have an idea that if you would give it me I might be of more use."

Lord Beaudesert frowned, as he answered haughtily, "I have no confidence to give. My daughter you have known from her babyhood, and she has been under Miss Beck's care ever since. Her friends are mine, and there is not one amongst them in whom she takes a special interest."

How could he tell to this kindly, gossiping doctor that his own pure-hearted Valerie had followed a stranger through the darkness till she was found close to the railway-station? How could he make her innocence a theme for all the evil tongues of the county? There was a mystery in it all which he could not fathom; but that his child was pure from any evil purpose in her strange disappearance on the night of the ball he was as certain as that he was possessed of Beaudesert, but it might not be so easy to prove it to anyone else.

Dr. Merton felt himself snubbed, and retired into grave silence, sitting down at a table in the library to write another prescription, whilst the Earl dashed off a telegram to Sir Timothy Drew, the well-known London physician.

Whilst the father was clinging to hope against the evidences of his own eyes, Lord Marshall and Rex Verreker were riding through all the beauty

of the summer's morning to the gloomy abode where they hoped to find Colonel Darrell.

Ivors Keep was approached by a long straight road leading through the heart of the forest of Bolton. The strip of grass on either side of the road was bright with many-coloured wild flowers; the birds were singing amongst the drooping branches, and bees were hovering from one dew-tipped blossom to another. It was a morning to fill any breast with thankfulness for the mere gift of life; but Verreker's heart, oppressed with its weight of sorrow, sank all the lower because of the contrast between his own dismal thoughts and the universal brightness around. Lord Marshall was not susceptible to the beauties of nature (except when exemplified by a beautiful woman), and any talk about them he contemptuously designated as "sentimental rubbish."

He was at present much occupied by thinking over his approaching interview with Colonel Darrell, the prospect of which did not afford him any satisfaction. The ex-colonel of the 17th Lancasters was not a pleasant person to have a quarrel with; and in his heart of hearts Marshall was afraid of being turned into ridicule for believing that anyone, at a distance of about twelve miles, could influence a girl lying on a sick-bed and perfectly unconscious of her surroundings.

"Here we are!" he said, as cheerfully as he could, as they stopped in front of a stone archway and an iron gate. "I expect we shall have to knock for half an hour, for no one seems to be stirring."

"I have no intention of calling upon Colonel Darrell, so I shall wait outside; but remember to be as quick as you can."

"But, I say, if I want you, you will never hear me."

"Whistle to me out of any of the windows and I'll come to you at once."

"Yes, when it was too late. Hulloos, here comes Darrell himself, looking as spick-and-span as if he had been up for the last hour!"

Verreker turned his horse's head, and retired into the forest, although he felt much more inclined to rush at Darrell's throat; whilst Marshall went forward with a bland smile as the gate rolled back on its hinges.

"Surprised to see me, no doubt?" he began, with a laugh.

"Not in the least," said Colonel Darrell, quietly. "I've been expecting you."

"But not at this unearthly hour!" as he swung himself down from his horse.

"Why not? I've been up ever since half-past two."

Instantly it flashed through Lord Marshall's mind that he had been told it was half-past two when Lady Valerie rose up from her sick-bed, and his errand immediately became of more importance.

"Come into my own den; it is the only place that is comfortable."

He led the way to a room in a castellated tower, which was strewn with books and papers.

The window was opened which looked towards the west. Darrell pointed to a clump of trees on the horizon, and said, with a significant glance.—

"There is Beaudesert. They've been stirring early this morning."

"Perhaps you can tell me what I've come for?" said Lord Marshall, bantering.

"Certainly I can. That poor girl is at death's door, and gave you all a fright at half-past two by jumping out of her bed."

"How the deuce did you know that?" staring at his host in vacant astonishment.

Colonel Darrell smiled grimly, but said nothing.

"All I can suppose is that you pay somebody to give you an account of what goes on at Beaudesert," said Lord Marshall, recovering his common-sense, and irritated because he thought his friend was actually trying to dupe him.

"Much obliged for the insinuation!"—throwing back his head haughtily; "but I keep no spies!"

"Spies! No, of course not. I was only

joking. "Now look here, Darrell," his face growing very red, "if you've got the heart of a man you will leave that poor girl alone!"

Darrell frowned.

"If I hadn't a heart I would give her up at once; but I have!" striking the table with his fist, "and I can't."

"Do you wish for a corpse, because that's all you will get?" he said, roughly. "She's dying by inches!"

"I know it," gloomily; "but if she lives they'll give her to someone else."

"You can't be such a brute as to wish to kill her!" bursting out in righteous indignation.

No answer.

"They've got an idea in their heads that if you went out of England she might get rid of her delusions. Will you go?"

"No, nothing shall induce me!" with stern resolution.

Lord Marshall rose from his seat.

"You must. If the girl's life depends upon it I shall make you!"

"You!" with a glance of withering contempt. Then he hurried to the window and leant out, with a rapt expression on his face. "Don't you hear her? She's calling me. Valerie! Valerie! Come!"

"No! My ears are not quite long enough," said Marshall, drily; "but if, by any sort of conjuring stuff, that poor girl can hear you I won't stand by and hear her tortured. You must give her up, or else—;" his voice sank to an impressive whisper, and Darrell's face grew livid.

"You would turn sneak?" he hissed out between his teeth.

"I would do anything to save her!" Marshall answered, doggedly.

"Do you know that I could throw you out of the window and break your neck?" in sudden fury.

"Yes; but Verreker's waiting down below, and he would see you didn't escape the rope."

The two men exchanged furious glances, and the Viscount's were as fierce as Darrell's, for a conviction had gradually been forced upon him that Valerie de Montfort's life actually lay in this man's hands, and the thought gave him courage to face anything.

"Look here, Marshall, if I give her up now I may lose her for ever," he said in a changed voice.

"I can't answer for that, but all I know is that if she doesn't get any rest she will be dead before we get back, and if you can save her you must!"

Darrell passed his hand over his face, and then, with a heavy sigh, walked slowly back to the window.

"She is sinking fast; her voice is so low that I can scarcely hear it. Well, if I can save her, I will." He leant out as far as he could, his face strangely agitated, and said clearly and distinctly, "Valerie, good-bye. I am leaving you!"

Then he sank down on his knees, resting his elbows on the sill and his head on his arms, and so Lord Marshall left him.

In hot haste Verreker and Marshall rode back to Beaudesert, not knowing if the news would be death or life.

CHAPTER X.

THE OR DEATH!

BEAUMONT, the *jet*, ran down the steps of Beaudesert Castle, eyes of unusual emotion on his impassive face, —— at sight of him felt his heart jump —— mouth.

It was Lord Marshall who asked the question that Rex's lips refuse to a

"Well, any news?"

"Yes, my lord," with a trembling lip. "My lady is sleeping quietly, and the doctor says she has taken a turn for the better."

Something seemed to come between Verreker's eyes and the sun, and he turned away his head, whilst Marshall asked eagerly at what time the change had begun.

"About seven o'clock, the nurse told me." "Verreker, do you hear that? I heard a clock strike seven when I was talking to Darrell. I never knew such a curious coincidence in my life," said the Viscount, excitedly.

Verreker nodded, and, mounting the steps quickly, followed his friend into the dining-room, where breakfast was awaiting them.

The Earl was standing in the oriel window, with the old clergyman by his side, who had hurried up to the Castle without waiting for his breakfast, because his gardener had told him that he had seen the doctor gallop past at if for his life.

The Rev. Charles Winter had a kindly, benevolent face, and the air of a perfect gentleman. He was Valerie's devoted friend, and he took as much interest in her bright young life as if she had been his own daughter instead of the heiress of Beaudesert.

During her illness he had tried to be a comfort to her father, but he knew when it was best to hold his tongue, and when sympathy must be silent to be of any use—a golden lesson, which many would-be comforters are apt to forget.

Verreker grasped Lord Beaudesert's hand without a word, but the pressure of his fingers conveyed his heartfelt joy better than a well-turned sentence.

Lord Marshall was the only one who did full justice to the excellent fare provided by the housekeeper; but even he was glad when breakfast was over, and he was free to take his cigar into the stables, and think over the events of the morning.

He would have scoffed at anyone who told him that he could hear what was going on in a sick-room more than twelve miles away; and yet so long as he was with Darrell, and could see the expression of his face, as if he were listening with all his ears to a far-off voice, he could not doubt that in some mysterious manner the Colonel was able to hold communication with the spirit of the dying girl.

Now, amidst the common-place surroundings of the stable, with Verreker's favourite horse, St. Simon, rubbing his nose against his coat, it seemed as if he must have been cleverly barmozied.

He was thankful that none of the men at his own particular club knew of the scene at Ivens Keep, or they would be chaffing him about it all the days of his life.

He was safe with Darrell, who would be certain not to brag of it, and quite as safe with Verreker, to whom he had told none of the particulars.

Meanwhile, if Darrell had gone, there was no longer any fear of his intruding on Lady Valerie, and he himself was free to betake himself wherever he liked to go.

Lady Marshall was anxious to be escorted before long to Goodwood, but racecourse dissipations in the company of a nagging wife were not much to his taste.

It was too much like eating a delicious dish, with a nauseous sauce to spoil it. However, he should be glad to get away from Beaudesert, which, though a paradise to look at, had been as dull as the muddiest of ditches during the last week of anxiety.

He had felt all the while much like a policeman told off to keep guard against a Fenian outrage, and not quite certain in his own mind lest the outrage was making a fool of him, for Darrell liked to talk in a melodramatic manner, and few could guess how much his threats were worth.

All through that long summer's day Lady Valerie slept as quietly as a child. For seven days and nights she had known no rest, her voice had scarcely ever been still, and frequently it had required the physical force of both nurses to hold her down in spite of frenzied struggles, and prevent her from jumping out of her bed.

Now the sleep she was enjoying was that of utter exhaustion, and after it had lasted many hours the doctors became anxious lest it should never be broken.

Silently they sat by the bedside, watching every quiver of the long lashes, every heaving of the chest with a long-drawn breath. Slowly

Sir Timothy, who had arrived from London, stretched out his hand, and putting his finger on the slender wrist, pulled out his watch. Lord Beaudesert watched him with a sinking heart, and a terrible fear came over him. Just as he had been given a new hope, was he going to lose her, after all?

The physician's face was perfectly inscrutable, as he pointed to a glass containing a strong restorative, and said in a low voice, "We must give it her, whether we wake her or not."

"Of course you know best," said Dr. Merton, putting on his gold spectacles; "but sleep seems to me more precious than anything."

"Yes, but it won't be much use to her if she takes nothing. Raise her head gently."

Dr. Merton obeyed, and Sir Timothy put the spoon gently between the fevered lips. Some of the contents were spilt on the lace-edging of the sheets, but a small drop was swallowed, and both noticed it as a good sign. The doctors persevered, and during the course of half-an-hour the glass was emptied. Then the heavy head fell back on the pillow, but the cheeks were pale as death, whilst the breath came quicker.

Verreker came and listened at the door every ten minutes, but the nurses who were waiting in the dressing-room told him continually that there was no change. The silence of the house, no longer broken by delirious cries, seemed the precursor of that deathly stillness which comes when all is over, and again he was a prey to the most dismal forebodings.

What it would be to go back to the world without her he did not dare to think, whilst, on the other hand, if she recovered, that would be joy enough without troubling himself about the future. Yes! he would ask for nothing more except that she should not die. A step came along the corridor, and looking up he saw Lord Marshall coming towards him, his fat, good-natured face lit up by a bright sunbeam which poured through an open window.

"Any change?" he asked in a gruff whisper, not because he was cross, but his voice always became hoarse if he tried to lower it.

Verreker shook his head. "Still asleep."

"Ah, that's all right. I sent my man over to the Keep, and Darrell's gone. I thought he would keep his word. I say, what do you think of it?"

"Of what?" whispered Rex, leading him further away from the sick-room, and up to the window. The view was perfectly lovely, with shimmering river, and waving branches, and roses climbing hither and thither, but he saw nothing of it—only a small face drawn and pale, with large eyes wide open with awe and terror. Would it ever be his bliss to see them glowing with love for him?

"Of the whole business, of course," answered the other impatiently. "I never knew anything like it in my life. Did you ever have such influence over a girl that she could hear your voice at twelve miles off?"

"Not exactly, except through a telephone; but who could?"

"I didn't say that anyone could," hastily remembering that he had nearly betrayed himself; "but you will allow that Lady Valerie has been better ever since Darrell took himself off?"

"She has been better ever since the morning. I presume the fever had reached its crisis."

"If that's all you think about it, why, in Heaven's name, did you drag me out of my bed at that unearthly hour?" watching his face curiously.

"Because I was ready to catch at a straw."

"I think the straw in this case was a very substantial rope, and if it hadn't been for me you could never have made use of it. No need, my dear fellow, to be ashamed of the boat which brought you to land."

"I'm not, and to the last day of my life I shall owe you a debt of gratitude. I've got very little tin, and no influence, but if ever you want a friend to stand by you—"

He didn't finish his sentence, but he laid his

hand on Marshall's shoulder, and the Viscount nodded his thanks.

There was a silence for a few minutes, and then Lord Marshall pulled out his watch.

"Half-past six. Just in time to get over to Scarsdale before dinner. They asked me, but I couldn't tell if I shouldn't be able to come—depend on Lady Valerie. Couldn't you come, too? She's better, you know, and they would be awfully glad to see you."

"Thanks, I'd rather not," stifly.

"Just as you like—do you all the good in the world."

With a little nod he walked off, and Rex, resting his arms on the window-sill, wondered how this man, who did not call himself quite heartless, could go and dine out, and laugh and laugh, and chaff, as he was sure to do with Flossie Springold, whilst the other girl, younger and still more beautiful, hung between the rival angels of life and death.

If he himself had been forced into going by some cruel necessity which he could not avoid, he knew that he would have sat like an automaton at Colonel Springold's table, without a word or a look for any of the company.

"Verreker, come!"

The Earl was standing by his side, his whole being evidently stirred by a new emotion. Was it hope or despair that made his voice so husky, and gave a tremble to his clear-cut lips?

With a beating heart Rex followed Lord Beaumont down the corridor to the door which he had first passed through that morning with a dying girl in his arms.

The father looked at him as he hesitated, and pushing the door open, as a sign that he might enter, said in a low voice,—

"She has asked for you."

He did not add that he thought she had only asked for him that she might wish him a last good-bye, for the words stuck in his throat.

As in a dream Rex walked slowly forward, the carefully darkened room seeming like night after the sunshine outside.

At sight of the good-looking young man Sir Timothy Drew rose from his chair by the bedside, and withdrew with his colleague to a little distance.

There was breathless silence for a minute, whilst every eye was bent on the white face resting in such evident helplessness on the cushions of the bed.

At first Valerie did not seem conscious of Verreker's presence, and the only sign of life she showed was the rising and falling of the sheets over her chest. Then gradually she turned round about the space of an inch, slowly raised her heavy lashes, and met the glance of devoted tenderness which he was bestowing on her. A sudden light seemed to break over her senses, her lips parted with an eager smile.

"You've come," she said, in a tremulous voice. "Then I am safe."

And with a sob in his throat Rex tumbled down on his knees, and buried his face on her small, shrunken hands.

CHAPTER XI.

FLIRTING.

YES! Lady Valerie had spoken the truth. She was safe—safe from the jaws of death; safe from the yawning grave—at least for the present time. And those around her in their exuberant joy never asked if the evil had quite departed; never guessed that a shadow was still left, which might at any moment dim the brightness of her young life. The Earl was content to see the gradual progress towards reviving strength, the sweet colour coming back to the soft cheeks, the light to the lovely eyes. He wished to bury all remembrance of the strange events on the night of the ball, and studiously avoided any mention of Colonel Darrell's name. Beaumont kept his own counsel in spite of the devouring curiosity of the other servants, and the whole affair was supposed to be forgotten. Lord Marshall departed, promising to return in the autumn and make havoc among the partridges, but Rex still lingered, though his leave was nearly up.

He knew that it was folly to stay, and yet he could not go away, when it was such an exquisite delight to wait on Valerie and watch her daily increase of strength. Surely there was no harm in it. It pledged her to nothing, and she was too weak as yet not to accept any amount of service as her rightful due. Everyone was her slave. Her father would give up his ride if he thought that she was in the humour for a little chat. Miss Beck often suffered the pangs of hunger rather than leave her to go down to luncheon or dinner, and there was nothing on earth that Rex Verreker would not do, if only to prove that she was his one thought night and day.

Thus surrounded by an atmosphere of love, Lady Valerie flourished like a rose in the sun. Even the awe which she had felt for her father had been dispelled by his exceeding tenderness, and she lay on a sofa in the garden one afternoon in August, feeling as happy as a child, undisturbed by the fear of a sad morrow.

Lord Beaumont was sitting in a cane armchair, with the *Times* on his knee, and Miss Beck was tranquilly knitting. Having come to the heel of her stocking, she was knitting her brows as well as her silken thread! The rush of the river, the gentle waving of branches, made a pleasant noise in the air; and it was very pleasant to sit under the shade of an arbour, over which the broad leaves of the eucalyptus were trained, and pity the poor labourers gathering in the harvest down there in the valley, in fields lost in a golden haze.

Lady Valerie felt too lazy to do anything but lie still and dream. Yet every time a step approached she was ready to raise her head and look round, although it generally turned out to be a gardener pursuing his daily avocations. After repeated disappointments a sigh escaped her lips. In an instant her father looked up, and asked her if she wanted anything, and Miss Beck's knitting fell down on her lap.

"I want it to be time for five o'clock tea, for I'm very thirsty."

"It shall be time now, though it is only half-past four," said the Earl, with a smile, as he folded his paper, and got up from his chair. "I am going for a ride, and I'll order it on my way. You don't want me?"

"Not at all," looking up at his tall, aristocratic figure with fond, adoring eyes. "Becky's here to take care of me. Go and see somebody. You have neglected all your friends in the most shocking manner. Is Mr. Verreker going with you?"

"Verreker? No; he has gone to Scarsdale Park. Didn't you know it?"

A shade passed over her face, and she turned it toward the back of the sofa.

"No; of course he would know that I shouldn't care."

"Exactly," in a cheerful tone of acquiescence. And he went away, comforting himself with the thought that after all his little girl only cared for the young fellow as a friend. Verily, some men are blinder than any bat!

All the rest of the afternoon Lady Valerie was restless and dissatisfied; in fact, as nearly as cross as Miss Beck had ever seen her since the days when she had always been inclined to think her addition sums far too long. The tea, when it came, was not strong enough; bread-and-butter she could not possibly eat. The scent of the eucalyptus was too strong, and the position chosen for her sofa was quite the worst in the garden.

Miss Beck offered to summon any amount of footmen in order to have it moved, but Lady Valerie told her that she couldn't bear to make a fuss; and with a sigh of irritation, would-be resignation, added,—

"Helpless people must submit to being uncomfortable."

"Not when everyone is ready to help them," said the old maid, with some heat.

No answer; but presently a small hand, terribly thinned by illness, was stretched out, and as Miss Beck felt it on her shoulder she knew that Valerie was sorry, and the momentary irritation was forgotten in loving forgiveness.

(To be continued.)

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The most valuable almanack in the world is preserved in the British Museum. It is written in red ink on papyrus, and it is believed to be about 3,000 years old.

In order to prevent the spread of disease by means of library books, a sterilising apparatus has been brought out in New York. It consists of a double-walled box of iron, in which are shelves for the reception of books.

FACETLÆ.

"WHAT induced her to tell you her real age?" "It was at her birthday-party, and I was giving her a kiss for each year."

VISITOR: "What lovely furniture!" Tommy: "Yes; the man we bought it from is sorry now he sold it; he's always calling."

"OUR neighbours are shiftless people." "How do you know?" "When I go over to borrow anything they never have it."

"I CALLED twice, and found you out," said Mrs. Jones. "Very good," said Mrs. Smith. "I had to call but once to find you out."

FRED: "How do you like the table at your new boarding-house? Is there anything to object to?" ARTHUR: "Precious little."

"JOHN," said the wife of a Kentucky editor, "your patent combination pocket-knife is rusty—all but the corkscrew part."

A YOUNG lady was asked recently, which she preferred of the two brothers. She responded: "When I am with either of them I prefer the other."

"JOHNNY," said the Sunday-school teacher, "what is our duty to our neighbours?" "To ask 'em to tea soon as they get settled," said Johnny.

"WAS the dear girl happily married?" "It was one of the happiest weddings I ever saw. There were so few duplicates among the presents of cut-glass and silver."

SHE: "This paper tells of a man who stepped off Shakespeare's Cliff at Dover, and dropped 300 feet." HE: "Great Scott! He must have been a human centipede."

"YOUR dog seems to follow you without orders." "Yes, he wouldn't take any orders from me. He's been in the family long enough to know the real boss."

SHE: "Why, Mr. Smith, you don't mean to say you have taken up golf!" Smith (aged 75): "Yes. I found I was getting a bit too old for lawn tennis."

A COUNTRY paper has this item: "Those who know old Mr. Wilson of this place personally will regret to hear that he was assaulted in a brutal manner last week, but was not killed."

"How far back on the family tree did he trace his lineage?" "To the third limb." "Why did he stop there?" "His great-great-grandfather was dangling on it."

"I'M sorry, madam, but we can't exchange those goods." "But my husband doesn't like them." "Why don't you exchange your husband?"

NEWLYWED (bitterly): "There isn't a day but my wife asks me for money." Old-timer (enviously): "You lucky cuss! There isn't a day but I have to ask my wife for money!"

IDA: "They say Maud didn't succeed as a nurse." MAY: "No; she aroused the patient every few minutes to ask him if he was resting easy."

GRANDMA: "Ah, my dear, the men are not what they were fifty years ago." ETHEL: "Well, granny, you know fifty years will change any man."

"How did Spender strike you the first time you saw him?" "More favourable than he did the second time." "Is that so. How was that?" "Why the second time it was for £5."

SHE: "I'm sure I've cast my bread on the water many a time, and I don't see any results." HE: "No; I presume your bread would sink, dear."

RUDOLPH: "Two young gentlemen wish to meet two young ladies with a view to matrimony. Money no object. How will that do, me lord?" RUPERT: "Money no objection. That sounds better."

MARY: "How do you manage to wake up so early in the mornings?" ANNIE: "Oh, I make myself believe that every morning is Sunday morning, and that I may sleep if I want to. Try the scheme, it's great."

POLY: "The way that man looked at me was positively insulting!" DOLLY: "Did he stare at you long and insolently?" POLY: "No. He gave me one glance and then looked at something else."

SWEET GIRL (affectionately): "Papa, you wouldn't like me to leave you, would you?" PAPA (for dily): "Indeed I would not, my darling." SWEET GIRL: "Well, then, I'll marry Mr. Poorchap. He's willing to live here."

MAN enters newspaper office. Editor looks up in alarm. "My dear sir," says the visitor, "I have a warrant for your arrest." Editor: "Thank heaven it is no worse! I thought you had a poem!"

SNOOKS: "So your wife's mother lives with you, does she?" Well, I don't think I'd let my mother-in-law come to live with me." BROOKS: "No; but this is different. You see, we—or—want to live with her."

A CERTAIN lady assured her husband that she never told him a lie nor never would. He told her that he did not doubt it, but would hereafter cut a notch in the piano when he knew she deceived him. "No, you won't," she screamed, "I'm not going to have my piano ruined."

NEIGHBOUR: "My! my! Sir, the story is true, and your husband has really eloped with the servant girl." DESERTED WIFE (weeping): "Yes, and she was the best girl I ever had, too—a perfectly lovely cook, and so quiet and respectful. Goodness knows where I'll be able to get another."

"WHY the dickens don't you stop?" asked the angry householder. "The fire is all out." "I allow it is," admitted the leader of the village fire-brigade; "but there are three windows not broken yet."

"If I had known," sobbed young Mrs. FITS, "that you would be such a brute to poor Fido, I never, never would have married you!" "My dear," replied Mrs. FITS, "the anticipation of kicking that miserable little beast was one of my chief reasons for proposing to you."

"Now, I suppose," remarked Mrs. ANDREWS, "that the surgeons of the Army are attached to the medical corps?" "Your supposition does you credit," replied her husband sarcastically. "It's a wonder you didn't imagine the doctors joined the Army for the purpose of building bridges or going up in balloons. Where should Army surgeons be, except in the medical corps?" "Well, I thought they might possibly belong to the Lancasters."

He was a fragile youth, and didn't dance all the dances. "Let's sit it out," he said to his pretty partner. "Where?" she asked. "On the stairs." So they went up a little way and sat down. "Wh-why, what's the matter, Mr. Duncan?" cried the fair girl; for the young man had hastily risen and was gasping for breath. His face was livid, his eyes rolled. "What kind of attack is it?" she gasped. At this question his voice came back to him. "What difference does that make?" he growled, harshly. Then, without a word of apology, he dashed up the stairs into the men's coat-room. Ah! how was she to know that it was an ordinary carpet tack left standing on its head?

He was a most obliging grocer in the suburbs—always ready with a bright smile, always eager to confer favours on his customers. He would smile, wash his hands in inviolable water, and say: "And what's for you, madam?" in such a tone as evoked the envy of all rivals. In came a little, lispig girl, carrying a huge ex-corned-beef tin. The grocer smiled as ever; he was too broad-minded to make distinctions for age. "And what's for you, dear?" he asked. "Please, this, a pound of tweats, pleats." "Certainly, dear." Then he weighed the tin. It was a work of difficulty, for it was cumbersome of shape and awkward to weigh. The grocer's temper was tried, in spite of his normal equanimity, and somewhat hastily he filled the tin with syrup. "Now," he said, "there's a good pound—over weight, dear. Where's the threepence?" "Please, sir, it's in the tin!"

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SOCIETY.

The possibility that the Duke of York may return to service in the navy is being discussed at Portsmouth. The new battleship *Glory* has undergone steam and gunnery trials, and it is rumoured that the Duke of York will hoist his pennant on board of her.

The Emperor and Empress of Russia have had several Imperial shooting parties. The Emperor is not an enthusiastic sportsman, but his brother and heir presumptive, who is now a very great personage in Russia, is a keen sportsman and an excellent shot.

The Princess of Wales will stay at Sandringham until the middle of this month, save for, perhaps, a short visit to the Queen. The Prince of Wales will be formally invited to Hull in May next to cut the first sod of the North-Eastern, Hull and Barnsley Railway.

The Grand Duke Constantine having prepared a translation of *Hamlet*, has determined to appear in the character of the moody Prince, and in addition to some semi-public performances which he has already given, the Imperial actor is shortly to appear before the Tsar and Tsaritsa and members of the Imperial Court.

It seems more than probable that all the Drawing Rooms will be held after the Queen's return from Bordighera, by which time, it is hoped, the shadow of war will have lifted, if not have absolutely passed; in which case we might confidently look to the Queen to hold more than one Drawing Room in person, and so insure a brilliant send-off for the season, when the tyranny of war is overpast.

The depressing effect of the war is as visible at Court as among society in general. The Queen is deeply affected by the large death-roll, and specially feels the losses among the Guards. All the latest war news is at once sent to Windsor when it comes in, while the Queen is perpetually sending kindly messages to those who have lost relatives in the struggles. These constant messages from their Sovereign have an immensely inspiring influence on the men. One of them, it is reported, said with enthusiasm the other day, "Such a Queen as that is worth fighting for."

A GREAT novelty is the double-faced fan, showing the interior of a room on the one side and the exterior on the other. In one of these a figure dressed in the costume of the early part of this century is seen passing through the doorway, either in or out, according to the side of the fan. This is flanked by cupids acting as cooks, and a group of guests. These fans demand special skill, the two sides are painted on separate pieces of lisse, and requires a great neatness in adjusting. The flowers in the new lace fans are exceedingly large, indeed, almost of natural size, as shown in the illustration of a fine Brussels lace fan on black grounds, the white lace fan on black grounds, the white lace palleted in silver or diamonds.

The Duke and Duchess of Coburg have been staying at Gotha, where they will remain until the middle of this month, and the accouchement of the Crown Prince of Rumania took place there at the Friedenstein Palace. Her infant daughter is to be named Victoria, after the Queen, and Alexandra, after the Emperor Alexander the Second. The Duke of Coburg will go to Italy for about two months when he leaves Gotha, and he will shortly pay a brief visit to St. Petersburg, while the Duchess intends to accompany the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Rumania on their return to Bucharest where she will stay for several weeks. The Duchess is to spend the month of May at Darmstadt, in order that she may be with her second daughter, the Grand Duchess of Hesse, when her accouchement takes place. This event is awaited with much anxiety, as the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess have only one daughter, and there is as present no heir to the Grand Duchy of Hesse, which would be absorbed into the Kingdom of Prussia unless some special arrangement could be made for Princess Louis of Hesse to succeed her brother, a method of solving the difficulty which would meet with hearty approval at the Court of St. Petersburg.

STATISTICS.

SPAIN has more sunshine than any country in Europe. The yearly average is 3,000 hours.

AMONG the professional women, hospital nurses it is said, head the list of marrying women.

A GERMAN military officer estimates that during the present century no less than 30,000,000 men have been killed in war in civilised countries.

A CENTURY ago only 300 species of orchids were known, and those very imperfectly. Now the latest authority gives the extreme number of known species as 10,000.

GEMS.

THERE is always compensation. Our angels go out that our archangels may come in.

IT is a poor wit who lives by borrowing the words, decisions, maxims, inventions, and actions of others.

IT is impossible that an ill-natured man can have a public spirit; for how should he love ten thousand men who has never loved one.

THE high-road to success has never been a smooth or even course. One must be prepared for a perplexed and tortuous path and many apparent failures before the goal is reached. He who turns back at the first obstacle will certainly never achieve his end.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BREAD-AND-CHEESE PUDDING.—Grate half a pound of cheese. Dry in the oven six ounces of bread, and then pound it to powder. Mix the bread and cheese together, add half a saltspoonful of salt, two teaspoonsfuls of mustard, a little pinch of cayenne pepper, one egg, and half a pint of new milk. Bake in a moderate oven for one hour.

CHICKEN PATTIES.—Mince some cold chicken and a little cooked ham, moisten with gravy, and add a few drops of lemon-juice, also salt and pepper to taste. Roll out some puff pastry and stamp it into rounds. Lay half the rounds on greased patty-pan. Brush round the edges with beaten white of egg, and put some of the minced chicken on each round; cover with the remaining circles of pastry. Brush over with white of egg; press the edges slightly together, and bake in a quick oven for about twenty minutes. Eat hot or cold.

SOOTON SHORTBREAD.—Half-pound flour, quarter-pound butter, two ounces fine sugar; fresh butter is best; put the above three things down on the backboard, and first of all knead the butter and sugar together; then gradually knead both into the flour, or rather knead the flour into them—you must use nothing else—just knead until you have all into one firm lump; divide this in two, make each piece quite round and about half-an-inch thick, pinch the edges, prick the top over with a fork, flour on oven shelf, put it on, and bake it in a quiet oven till it is a pale yellow colour.

KIDNEY CAKES.—Ingredients: Three ounces fresh white crumbs, three ounces cooked sheep's kidney, one egg, one tablespoonful chopped parsley, salt and pepper. Chop the kidney and parsley very finely, then mix them with the crumbs and seasoning. Beat up the egg, and add enough of it to bind the kidney, &c., together. Shape the mixture into small, round flat cakes. Brush them over with a beaten egg, then cover them well with breadcrumbs. Fry in plenty of boiling fat; take care that a faint bluish smoke is rising from the fat before you put in the cakes. When they are a nice colour take them out and drain on paper. Serve on a fancy lace-paper garnished with fried parsley.

MISCELLANEOUS.

"OPPORTUNE" once signified nothing more than "to be at the harbour." An opportune ship was a ship which had come to port.

ASPARAGUS is so plentiful on the Russian steppes that the cattle eat it like grass. The seeds are sometimes dried and used as a substitute for coffee.

A FRENCH scientist has made some plants "artificially Alpine" by keeping them in an ice-box all night and exposing them to the full action of the sun during the day.

A BULLET PROOF shield has been invented by a steel-making firm. This shield is fixed to the rifle, and weighs only 7 lb., giving complete cover to a man lying prone.

BELLOWS the waters of Monterey Bay, California, lies a sunken craft that once helped to make history. She is the *Natalie*, which in 1815 carried Napoleon back to France from Elba.

THE most expensive material worked into a garment was the gold brocade purchased in 1670 for a robe for Louis XIV. at a cost of 17 guineas a yard.

THERE now remains only one people and one little valley south of the Equator whose sovereignty has not been claimed by some European Power. It is the valley of Barotse, fifty or sixty miles wide, north of Lulul, in South Africa.

IT is believed that the smalls which appear in the chalk pastures after rain, and are devoured by the sheep along with the herbage on which they feed, are largely responsible for the peculiar flavour for which Southdown mutton is famed.

ARTIFICIAL flowers were unknown to the ancient civilised nations of Europe. They are first mentioned in Italy in the fourteenth century, but in China they were known at an earlier date.

GERMAN military experts are just now making elaborate experiments in order to test the value of a sugar diet in cases where troops are called upon for exceptional exertions in a brief period.

THE lark ascends until it can with difficulty be seen by the naked eye, and yet every note it utters will be distinctly audible to anyone fully half a mile from the nest over which the bird utters its song.

THE country around Ladysmith, on the Orange Free State border, is flat till it reaches the foot hills on the mountain range; and there is little cover on the veldt, the scrub, indeed, being of the scantiest.

BEFORE the invention of iron skates rough bone skates were always used, and apparently with just as much enjoyment. The bones needed little alteration, and the speed attained on these rough skates was considerable.

SAKAI, a seaport town near Osaka, Japan, promises to become the Sheffield of the East. A company has been formed to engage in the cutlery trade there. This city has had from time immemorial a high reputation for its cutlery.

THE seahorse alone with one other existing fish, the gar pike, possesses the power which was common to many of the older fishes—that of turning its head independently of its body. The seahorse can also turn its eyes in almost any direction.

SOME persons believe that the sending of valentines grew out of a practice prevalent in ancient Rome at the festival of the Lupercalia, during the month of February, when, among other ceremonials, the names of young women were placed in a box, from which they were taken by young men at chance directed. This proceeding raised a howl of indignation from the good fathers, and a meeting was held whereat a compromise was made by the young folks agreeing to send cards with verses of love written thereon, and not to sign their names. In a little while, when the young Roman maidens began to attend what is now called "high school," they learned to paint, and at once ornamented their valentines with birds and flowers.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

R. M.—You can compel him to remove it.

GWEN.—The honeysuckle means secret love.

NANO.—We know of no such establishment.

KOBRAK.—We have no figures that give what you want.

A. J. C.—Apply to Home Secretary. It does not cost much.

E. H.—A matter of search at Somerset House; fee £1. 7d.

MICHAEL.—You should add a little turpentine to the hot starch.

INQUIRER.—The question is a trade, not a household, matter.

JACK TAN.—There is no purchase of commissions in the English Navy.

ROULETTE.—Roulette is a French word, meaning a little wheel or ball.

H. S.—You must first be naturalised, which requires five years' residence.

EDWIN.—The writing of plays is not remunerative except to a chosen few.

G. N.—Clerks and shopkeepers' assistants are not wanted in our colonies.

L. B.—Lotteries are illegal in England, and most of the foreign ones are frauds.

FELICIA.—Ordinary marriage ceremony will constitute binding marriage in England.

SOLDIER'S LADS.—The Scots Guards and Coldstream Guards are both infantry regiments.

TERENCE.—When a lady is walking with a gentleman he takes the outside of the pavement.

CECIL.—Use a velvet brush, or wipe them by drawing a soft silk handkerchief round and round them.

M. W.—Application to any of the shipping offices would probably give you all the information you want.

QUERENT.—Barbers were originally also surgeons, and they used to bind their patients' limbs after blood-letting.

BERT.—You would require a licence to make fireworks, whether they are for your own amusement or for sale.

EMMY.—Rub it over with beeswax and turpentine, and polish it up after it has been thoroughly washed and dried.

T. J.—To recover damages for the bite of a dog you must prove that the owner knew the dog to be dangerous.

S. E. F.—Baratonga is a little dependency of New Zealand, which has a British Resident and a miniature legislature.

CURIOS.—"To launder" once signified to lavender or perfume clothes with the leaves of this plant before being laid away.

L. M.—Imprisonment for life extends to twenty years; that is the earliest date at which a reprieved man can be liberated.

INONAMUM.—Pretoria is capital of the Transvaal, though Johannesburg is more important; like Edinburgh and Glasgow.

P. S.—Rub them over with a reviver made of one part vinegar to two parts boiled linseed oil. Then polish with a soft duster.

IGNORANT.—A "military band" differs from full military bands, in being wholly composed of wind instruments and drums.

MAJUBA.—The British losses at Majuba Hill were: killed, 3 officers and about 82 men; many wounded; 122 prisoners; and some missing.

ARTHUR.—The capital of the Transvaal—that is the administrative centre—is Pretoria, the commercial capital being, of course, Johannesburg.

ANXIOUS PARENT.—You are not obliged to find your daughter a home, but if she comes on the parish you may be called on to contribute to her support.

QUARTER.—The eldest son has no preference; the jewellery should be sold and price divided if parties cannot settle who are to have different articles.

CUNO.—The value of a thing is just what it will fetch, and that, in the case of something rarely in the market, is more than anyone can state with confidence.

ALVIN.—Bidell's comet has not been seen since 1812, though from preceding appearances it was calculated to have a circuit of something like six years nine months.

SWEET MARIE.—The conscience clause giving the right to claim exemption from vaccination for his children is not in force in either Scotland or Ireland, where there has been no demand for it.

ROBERT.—Try to be as attractive and pleasant to him as you can, but do not let your heart go out to him beyond recall until he has given you far better reasons for thinking he is in love with you.

W. G.—The estimated population of England and Wales at the 1891 census was 14,050,620 males, and 13,902,888 females. The population of the world was estimated in 1891 at 1,490,000,000 of both sexes.

DISTRESSED WIFE.—Women's Property Act came into force in 1881; wife can claim all she took with her into house at marriage, or has since acquired with her own earnings.

P. P. C.—The letters P. P. C. inscribed on a visiting card mean that the person is about leaving the neighbourhood; they are the initials for the French words, *vous prendre congé*, "to take leave."

UNCERTAINTY.—We do not feel justified in recommending you to adopt such a course. We should rather suggest that you do your best to hide the state of your feelings, and not to appear to seek his society.

O. O. M.—Sulphate of soda is obtained by treating common salt with sulphuric acid; we should think the operation is quite beyond you, as somewhat expensive machinery is necessary.

TORY TUVY.—Wash them with tepid soap and water and rub them bright afterwards with a soft flannel cloth. This ought to be sufficient, unless they have not been properly made or the natural shine taken off.

PARNASSIUS.—You should secure the services of a teacher once or twice weekly if possible; private teachers are in that way turned to best account; correspondence of little use.

OLD READER.—Fourpenny pieces were withdrawn from circulation in 1866; they are not even now refused in payment, but when received at the Bank are not passed out again.

CANNIBAL.—In the absence of a written engagement to the contrary, a domestic servant may always leave at the expiration of a calendar month's notice given at any time.

VOLUNTEER.—The Transvaal does not possess a standing army. The burghers, who in some sense correspond to our volunteers, are liable to be called up by the Government when there is fighting to be done.

WINTER ON THE HILLS.

WHAT do the city houselings know
Of Winter, half and hoar,
Who crouch beside the back-log's glow
Behind the battened door.

Not theirs the wonder of the waste,
White league on league out-rolled,
Not theirs 'neath spacious skies to taste
The tonic of the cold!

Not theirs the North Wind's breath to breast
Till each vertebrae warm
The while he drives along the west
The horses of the storm!

Not theirs the snow as soft as sleep
That hill and hollow hood;
Nor the oracular silence deep
Within the dryd wood!

Not theirs by night, undimmed to mark
The spangles of the Bear;
Nor through the dark from tree to tree
The pale aurora's fare.

Not theirs to share the proffered part
Of wealth he holds in store—
Not theirs to know the constant heart
Of Winter, hate and hoar.

SLAVEY.—Add paraffin in the proportion of a tablespoonful to a gallon to the water with which you clean your windows, and the glass will polish more quickly, and keep clean much longer.

H. R.—To procure the situation you wish for, application must be made to some shipowner; but as you have never been to sea before, difficulties may arise on that score.

HORNHAM.—Decidedly you should ask the young lady the size of her finger. Think how annoyed you would feel if the ring you chose was too large or too small. Ask her to send you the size of her finger cut in a piece of cardboard.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURE.—Oilcloth may be kept in good condition for years by being washed over once a week with equal parts of skim milk and water, and by rubbing over once in three months with linseed oil. Polish with a soft cloth.

ORANGE BLOSSOM.—In England a marriage can only be contracted in a private dwelling, other than a superintendent-registrar's, under an extraordinary license, granted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the cost of which is about £100.

POPPY.—Make a strong solution of gum-arabic and water, and stir in enough plaster-of-paris to form a soft paste. Brush this over the broken edge, press firmly together, keep in a dry place for three days, and then scrape off any superfluous cement.

PUREZ.—The difference between the meaning of the words emperor and king is simply that the former is from the Latin, and means "a sovereign over two or more nations or countries"; the latter, from the Saxon, means "the ruler over one nation."

ONE IN DEEP TROUBLE.—A widow may not claim her son out of the army at any time. But provided she produces satisfactory proofs that he is her sole support, as a rule the Secretary of State for War will give him his discharge as an act of grace.

CHLOE.—Nothing better brings out a bruise than arnica diluted; but remember not to mix it near a light, for arnica, like all tinctures, is highly inflammable. In case there be no arnica at hand, a mixture of vinegar and turpentine is a very good substitute.

POLE.—The great secret of washing chamois leathers is to rub them in weak suds instead of clear water. Rinsing in clear water makes them hard and stiff, while if they are washed in lukewarm suds, and rinsed in weak suds of the same temperature, they will be beautifully soft and pliable.

COOKIE.—Make a rich melted butter while you allow two eggs to boil. When the eggs are ready, throw them into cold water, then shell them and cut into neat slices. Add the slices of eggs to the sauce, season with a dash of cayenne and a dust or two of nutmeg. Give it one boil, stirring the whole time.

POLE.—Try the following: Dilute half a teaspooonful of oil of vitriol with a large spoonful of water, and carefully touch the ink-spot with a feather; rub it quickly off, and repeat the process till the spot disappears. Spirit of salt will answer the same purpose, and must be used with equal care, for fear of leaving a white pondice.

LIZETTE.—Take eighteen ripe tomatoes, six onions, three green peppers, one cup of sugar, two cups and a half of vinegar, two teaspooonfuls of salt, one teaspooonful each of cinnamon, allspice and nutmeg, and half a teaspooonful of cloves. Scald and peel the tomatoes until tender; then add the vinegar and spices and cook ten minutes longer.

MILICENT.—The art of arranging bouquets is very simple. It is only necessary to possess a good eye for colour, and to have some idea of the tasteful combination of the flowers, leaves and ferns employed. The most elegant bouquets of the present day are those in which the flowers of the season are skilfully arranged according to their hue, fragrance being made a secondary consideration to colour.

EARNEY.—No one but yourself can tell whether you are fitted to take up the career you mention. It needs very special qualifications for a girl to enter upon such a life, and it is quite impossible for a stranger to know whether you have such qualifications. In such a matter, and where so much is at stake, you should have the counsel and advice of one who has your interests at heart, and also the interests of the work you propose to adopt. If you think your minister is such a one, you should go to him in your difficulty and ask him to advise you.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—There will be no leap year now till 1904, in consequence of the regulation under which only every fourth century has a day added to it; this is to keep the calendar in strict accordance with the circuit of the earth round the sun; if a leap year were not dropped at intervals in this way, the difficulty which was encountered long ago of our dates getting ahead of the sun, and winter months catching up summer, would again have to be faced; the adding of a day to every century year is by a fraction a little too much, and the difference is adjusted by taking this day away from every century year except the fourth.

AN EXQUISITE MIND.—There are several reasons why the husband, as a rule, should be older than the wife. Among them may be mentioned the fact that a man arrives at maturity later, and also ages later than a woman; so that if a husband be eight or ten years older than his wife, when he is fifty and she forty, there is no violent disparity in personal appearance. Then, as the husband is the wife's protector, guardian, and friend, his having the weight of years on his side gives him greater moral power and dignity, and his experience of the world enables him to better perform his duties to his wife and family.

A. W.—Each Civil Service examination stands by itself; in a case where twelve places were being contested for and twenty passed, the twelve who are first on the list would get the preference, and the remainder would have to take their chance of doing better at the next examination; candidates for the post of female carrier in the Post Office are allowed to compete only for the town in which they apply to serve; those who pass but do not obtain situations require to compete once again for next vacancies occurring, although now and again when more vacancies occur after the examination has begun, those of the successful candidates next on list are appointed to them after the first vacancies are filled.

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